







MOSTLY CALIFORNIA

Don Blanding



BOOKS OF DONBLANDING

VAGABOND'S HOUSE ✓

SONGS OF THE SEVEN SENSES ✓

HULA MOONS

STOWAWAYS IN PARADISE

LET US DREAM ✓

MEMORY ROOM ✓

DRIFTER'S GOLD ✓

THE REST OF THE ROAD

FLORIDAYS ✓

PILOT BAILS OUT ✓

TODAY IS HERE ✓

MOSTLY CALIFORNIA ✓

Illustrated by the Author

BRIEF APRILS by Edythe Hope Genée

Illustrated by Don Blanding

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DON BLANDING

MOSTLY CALIFORNIA

by Don Blanding

Illustrations by the Author



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To you, my friends, many and varied, old and new,
Casual and intimate, and to a few
Who might think you are enemies . . . but are not,
And to you, dear ghosts, and to you, the treasured lot
Of half-friends, could-be-friends, almost-were-friends,
And to you, may-be-friends, as the long Tomorrow Road extends
Into the half-glimpsed years that shape ahead
I dedicate this book in gratitude for the thread,
Varicolored, many textured, dull or gleaming,
Which you have woven into my living, my dreaming,
My small triumphs, hopes realized, laughter and tears,
To make the gorgeous tapestry of my years
In California.

Aloha
Don Blending

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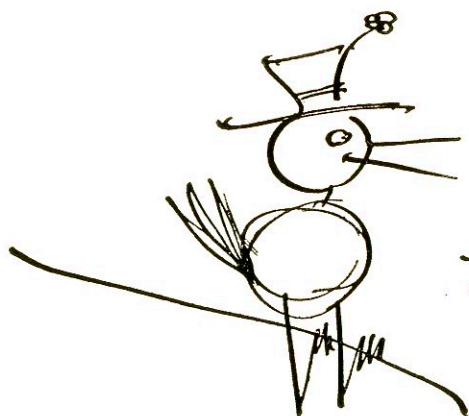
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MAHALO NUI OE
MUCHAS GRACIAS
MERCI BEAUCOUP
Thank you

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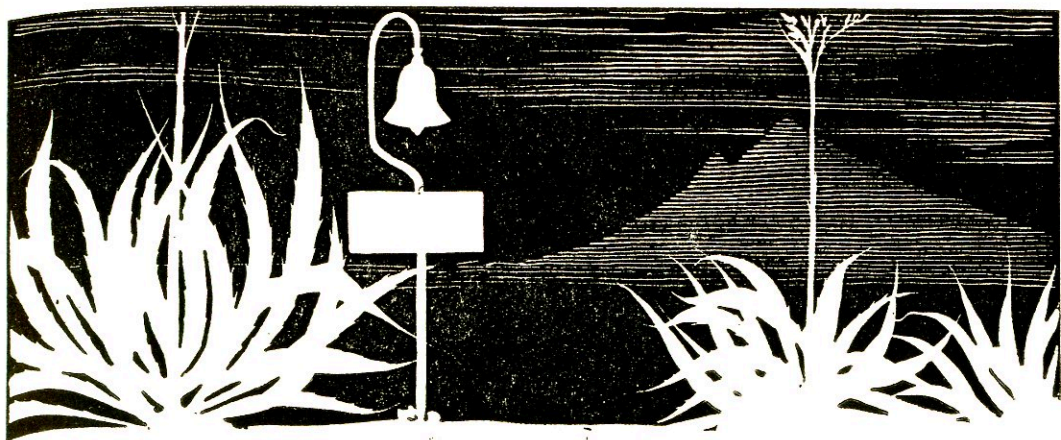
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To the D.B. Group, thanks for listening to preview readings of many of the poems in **MOSTLY CALIFORNIA**.

And an All Utility thanks to everyone who in one way or another helped with the inspiration and creation of my book.

Aloha and Mahalo Nui Oe.



THIS MIGHT BE CALLED A PREFACE

MOSTLY CALIFORNIA is not a Book On California, rather a book of California this-and-thats, packrat's loot, vagabond's gleanings, such a mixture as is found in small boys' pockets and most people's minds after a day of casual roaming

Down Highways and Low-Ways,
A few Heigh-De-Ho-Ways,
And Where-Do-We-Go-Ways,
Boulevards, Side Roads,
Narrow and Wide Roads,
Tried and Untried Roads,
Lanes and Blind Alleys,
On Casual Sallies
Through Deserts and Valleys,
Foot Trails and Bypaths,
Up-To-The-Sky-Paths,
Your Paths and My Paths.
I've gathered my treasure
Of uncertain measure
For your and my pleasure,
I hope you like it.





NO SUDDEN LOVE

I bring no sudden love to this bright land.

My boyhood heart was claimed by Western plains.

My youth's first passion burned where summer reigns
In drowsing beauty on a tropic strand.

Young manhood loved where Viking mountains stand,

Or followed wanderlust's wild gypsy strains

And yielded senses to the opiate grains

Of transient romance and desire's demands.

When North and East and South had fed the flame

Of high adventuring and frantic quest,

My heart returned each time in search of rest

And welcome in this land's warm kindly smile

Until the light of recognition came. . . .

This friend had been my lover all the while.



RANDOM TREASURE

What could this book be but vagabond's loot,
Random treasure found by the trail and road,
A bullet pried from a long-dead miner's boot
Hinting of desert ghost-town's lawless code,
A grinning gargoyle formed by a cypress root,
A golden nugget found in the Mother Lode?

What could this book be but a magpie's nest
Gaudy with wayside trifles' tinsel glint,
Sky-jewels spilled from the Magic Sunset West,
Gleaming cloud-coins filched from the dawn's bright mint,
Dusty bullion found in a Spanish chest,
A broken arrow-head of bloodied flint?

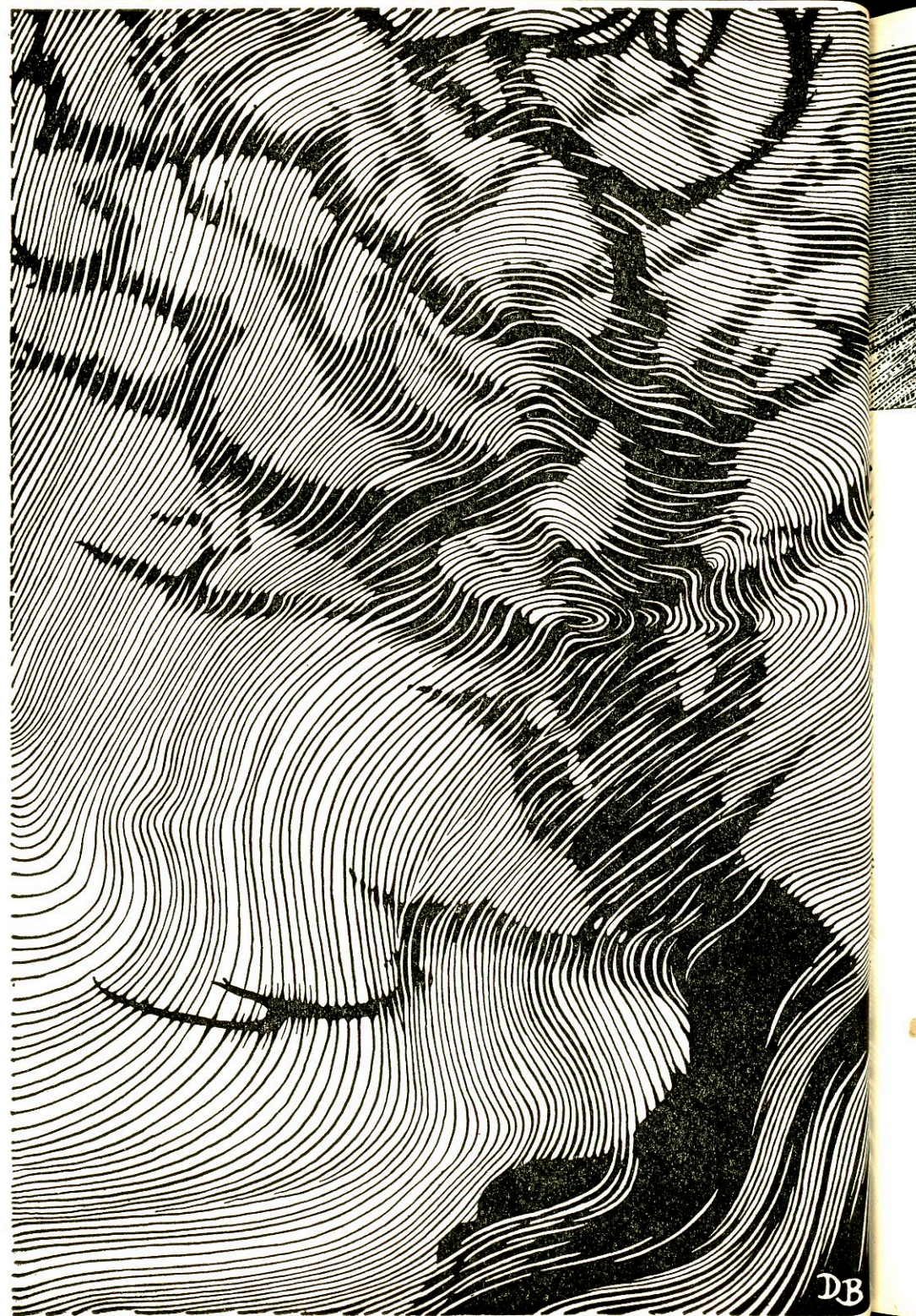
What could this book be but a pack-rat's hoard,
A bone or tooth from an ancient asphalt bed,
A splinter of pine from a weather-beaten board
Marking the nameless grave of frontier dead,
An outlaw's gun with its record grimly scored,
A proud gray plume that a speeding eagle shed?

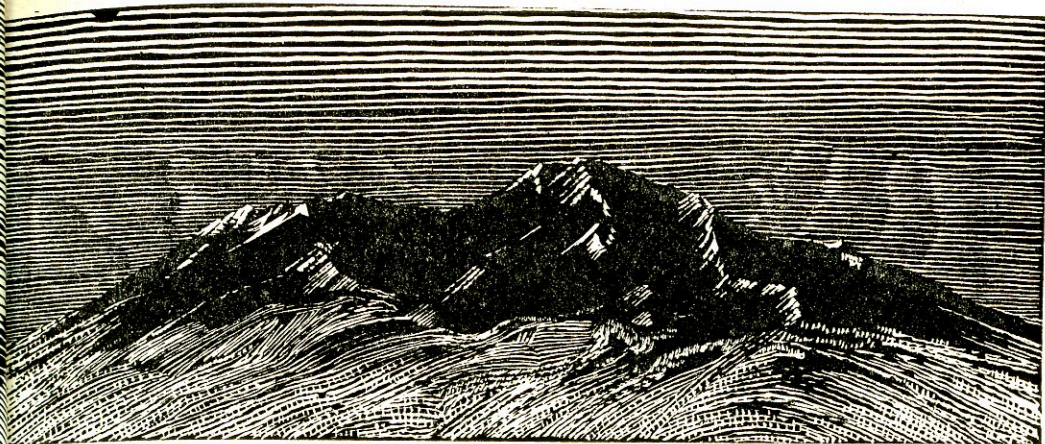
What could this book be but some ravelled dreams
Woven by youth's gay heart and frayed by years,
Fool's gold panned from High Sierra streams,
A folded letter sealed with futile tears,
Threads from a firm-stitched friendship's sturdy seams
Cut with a sudden slash of Death's harsh shears?

What could this book be but a half-told tale,
Pages torn from a diary, incomplete,
Hopes deferred and visions, great and frail,
Records of living, sweet and bitter-sweet,
Words from a living book of epic scale,
Rhythms timed to a mighty state's heart-beat?

What could this book be but a drifter's trail
Following padres' dusty sandalled feet,
Guiding by faith when trusted landmarks fail
Down shores where cliffs and savage ocean meet,
Seeing the ghost of an ancient vanished sail,
The phantom flagship of a nation's fleet?

What could this book be but a potpourri
Of fragrances from forest, peak and shore,
A thousand throats to sing one melody,
A bird's soprano and the sea's bass roar,
A patchwork quilt of senses, dreams and lore,
A friendly gift to you and you from me?

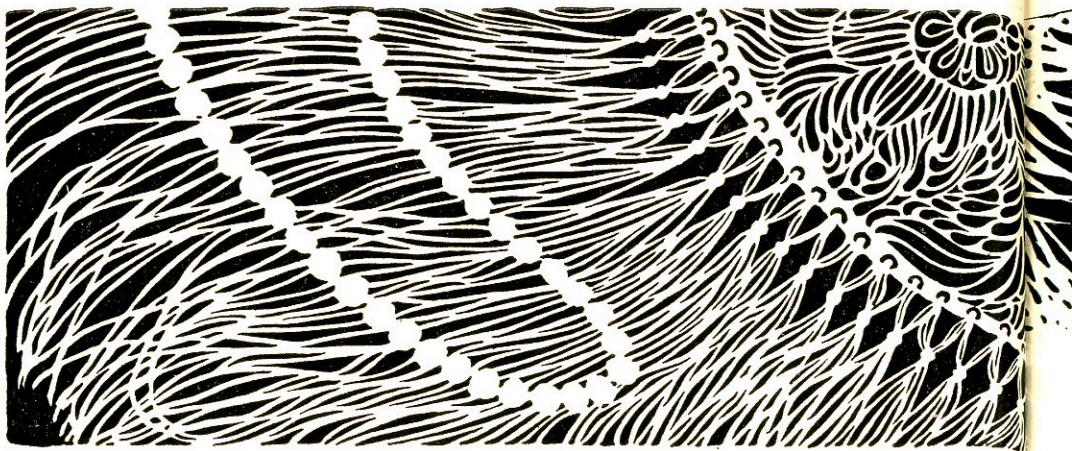




CALIFORNIA, PORTRAIT BY A LOVER

Every day my heart is busy
And my dazzled eyes are dizzy
Choosing colors, gay and vivid, stark and livid, soft and fainting,
Sunset crimson, winey madder,
Ochre, orange and the sadder
Tints of dusk and fading twilights, dimming highlights of my painting.
How the color swirls and rushes
As I dip my eager brushes
In the rainbow pools of pigments which are figments of my dreaming,
For with words I seek to render,
California, all your splendor
As I see you, young and brawny, fair and tawny, golden gleaming.

I would paint your splendid body
Clad in garments rich . . . and shoddy.
For my painted lyricisms, powdered prisms, sea verbena,
Mixed with lipstick, tears and star-dust,
Motor oil and grime and car-dust,
Fair Ramona with a touch of saint and much of Magdalena.
Now my memory is directing
Eyes and fingers in selecting
Smoky cobalt, murky umber, shades that slumber in the moonlight,
Sheen of leaf and bloom of petal,
Rust from old corroding metal,
Bougainvillea, gay and florid, in the torrid hour of noonlight.



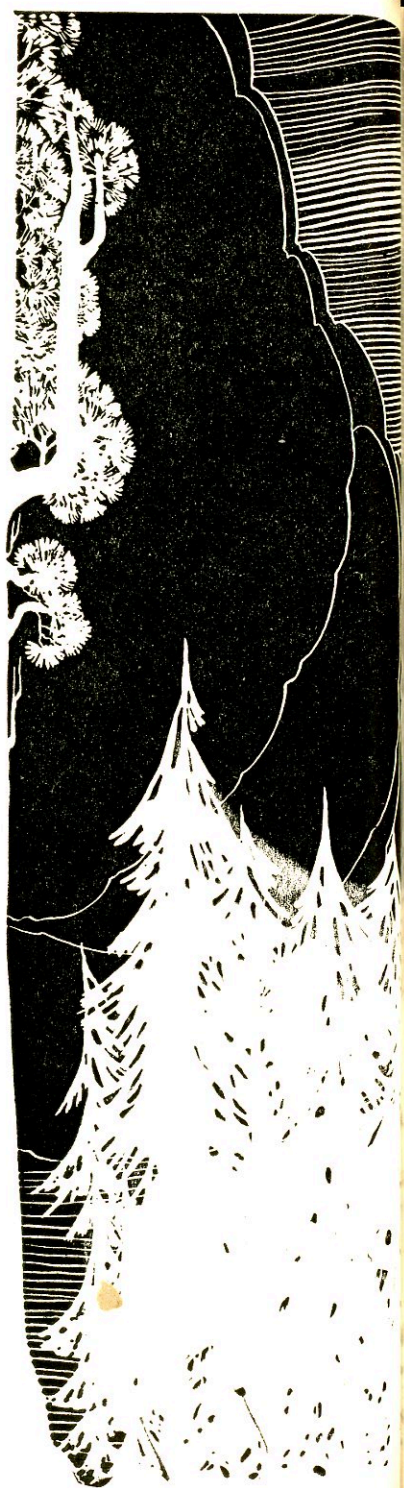
Colors robbed from glinting crystals,
Pollen brushed from poppy pistils,
Silver, pale and opalescent as the crescent moon emerges,
Russet leaves from Autumn dogwood,
Lichen-gray from rotting logwood,
Lapis lazuli and nacre as a breaker crests and surges.
I would bathe your flesh with spotlights,
Desert suns' inflaming hot lights,
Altar candles, whitely votive, automotive and fluorescent,
Flame of neon, gleam of starlight,
Gaudy flare of roadside bar-light,
Liquid shimmering of ocean's mystic motions phosphorescent.

Red of mountain manzanita,
Red of rouge from Carmencita,
Burlesque dancer's make-up, gaudy, crudely bawdy in its boldness,
Green of jade . . . the gift of China,
Nugget that a Forty-Niner
Tossed in tribute to your beauty, and the fruity citrus goldness.
How to paint the varied faces
And to show the mingled races
Which have blended in your bloodstream in the floodstream of your
history.
Spanish, British, Mongol, Russian,
Middlewestern, Yankee, Prussian,
Filipino, Japanese and the aborigines of mystery.



You are splendid, you are petty,
Perfumed, groomed . . . and frankly sweaty,
Eager-eyed and forward striding . . . God abiding, who can halt you?
You are greater than your weakness,
Alley-cat beneath your sleekness,
You are human, thus I'd paint you, never saint you nor exalt you.
Braggart-minded, many mooded,
Yet a flaw or fault excluded,
Or a specious virtue stated, over-rated, would distress you.
California, I despair of
Painting all I am aware of.
Not a portrait but a plural super-mural could express you.

All your history reads like fiction,
You're the darndest contradiction,
Though your past is wild and shady, you're a lady . . . and a great one.
Freckle-faced beneath your pallor,
Chippy-cheap, yet bright with valor,
Mongrel, hybrid, polyglot-ess, and a goddess . . . though a late one.
So I'll end my futile praising
And content myself with gazing
All enraptured by your features, by your creatures and your flowers,
By your mountains and your cities.
I'll confine my simple ditties
To my gratitude unmeasured for these treasured golden hours.



GNAT AND THE SEQUOIA

I was seated in front of the General Sherman tree, supposedly the oldest, largest living thing on earth, thirty-two and a half feet through and two hundred and sixty-seven and a half feet high, which gives no adequate idea of its vast self. A gnat came buzzing around my head. I gave it a puff of smoke and it withdrew to the great tree where it flitted and shimmered in a beam of light. It seemed to be talking to the great tree. I wondered what a gnat would have to say to a giant sequoia, and what a great tree would have to say to a gnat.

The tiny gnat with a wee thin voice spoke to Sequoia tree,
"I am the least of living things, would you deign to speak to me?
You must be God . . . or the brother of God . . . so old and great and tall."

Sequoia spoke from its mighty height, "We are only *large* or *small*,
Not *greater* or *less* in the eyes of God. We are his children, all.
Once I was less than the size of you, a germ of growth in a seed,
Driven to reach for the passing clouds by a silent urgent need.
Now I am tall, as men count tall, yet you with your shining wings
Can mount to the sky above my head for a God's-eye view of things.

To the mountain's gaze I am just as small as you seem small to me.
In the heart of God we are all the same, mountain, gnat and tree.
A life is as long as each may live, eon, millennium, day.
Each is a thought in the Mighty Mind, each perfect in his way.
We can repay, each in his way (God won't ask more than that)
If I try to be the *mightiest tree* and you be the *gnattiest gnat*.

. (this represents the gnat)

SEQUOIA WISDOM

The little Sequoia, ten years old, but oh, so slim and small
Trembled with fright to hear the crash of a great Sequoia's fall.
A roar of thunder shook the earth and the wind screamed out its pain
While the flailing branches clutched the air but clutched the air in vain.
A ghostly silence hushed the hills and the birds forgot their songs
As the vast vibrations echoed back with the sound of cosmic gongs.
The forest giant's tawny length racked with a shuddered breath
As the wind took up the mourning sigh which seemed to whisper,
"Death."

Three thousand years the tree had stood, monarch, supreme, alone.
Long centuries a sky-blue space would mark the vacant throne.

The little Sequoia, ten years old, but oh, so young and green,
Cried to its mother standing near like a silent widowed queen
At the bier of her lord with a muted grief too deep and sad for tears.
At last she spoke in a still dark voice to hush her small one's fears,
"Weep, Child, weep, for what you have seen. Weep once . . . then weep
no more.

Death is the life by which we live. The tree on the forest floor
Yielded its place that you might live, and living, touch the sky,
As you and I when our time has come will sway and fall and die.
This is the law, the knowing law, ancient and kind and just;
The seed is given its birth in dust and returns that life to dust.
Death is a pause in the forest day. When you are as old as I
Then you will know as I know now, the answer, the age-old Why.
It is not easy to say "Farewell" to the sun, the stars and the rain.
It is not easy to understand the healing that comes from pain.
You can not know until you have known the test of searing fire.
The jagged wound of the lightning's kiss, and the scar of its white
desire

And you can not know until you have known the strength that is in
our breed

To heal the wounds and build new power to meet a greater need.
But you will know as I know now when your life has been fulfilled
Why kings must fall to the waiting earth and the life-sap must be
spilled.

We live through *you* and the seed of *you*; that is the law of the tree,
The great must pass so the small may live . . . as our immortality.

FOR CATHERINE

You said, "I want to be tall
And graceful and lovely."
Tall . . . you are tall as a tree
Reaching through shadows to the sun.
Only the seekers of light are truly tall.
Graceful . . . you learned to dance among sword blades.
Lovely . . . who can be lovelier
Than one who distills perfume from tears.

QUESTION

Shall I not forgive who have been forgiven
 $7 \times 7 \times 7 \times 7$?



HEARTS WEST

The New Pioneers

There will always be young and eager hearts
Rebel to settled ways and well-thumbed charts
Of usage. They are blazers of new trails,
Watching with wistful eyes as daylight fails,
Giving their dreams the freedom of swift wing
To follow on the sunset's westering.
Young hearts, but of an old nomadic breed
Riding the wind like drifting thistle seed
Drawn by the magic of the setting sun,
West, west and west . . . and ever west they run
Knowing not whether they are blessed or cursed . . .
Nor questioning too much. The best and worst
Are brothers of the clan who gather now
Along the blue Pacific shore. The prow
Of ships is changed to jet-propulsioned wings.
They hear the ancient voice that softly sings
Its siren song beyond the sky's dark verge,
Answering, as their fathers did, the urge
To tame the wilderness, and having tamed,
Journeying on to land, unknown, unnamed.
There are new frontiers awaiting them,
Islands that glow with green of emerald gem
In jewel seas; jungle and broad plain
Where East goes West to turn to East again,

Closing the circle which their forbears drew
Through ages lost in Time's receding blue.
There they will find young kindred hearts to join
In minting ancient gold to newer coin,
Retimbering old temples to new codes,
Breaking the foot-worn stones to pave new roads,
Fusing the many worlds to one new world,
Lifting the quenchless torch so often hurled
From hand to hand and handed on once more
From land to land, from shore to distant shore.

God speed, young hearts, God speed and bon voyage!
And if your siren's name should be "Mirage,"
Follow the call, so old, so old and ever new.
The gold is in the going, not the goal. Adieu.

CALIFORNIA SUNDAE

Have you tasted the air today?
It is sunlight honey
Poured over champagne-sherbet
Of winds from the snow-capped peaks, bluely distant,
Flavored with orange-flower water
From the citrus groves,
Topped with whipped cream
And marshmallow of clouds
Spiced with the red maraschino cherry
Of the setting sun.





SMALL BOY AND THE ARTIST

Any artist sketching in the open will attract two things, gnats and small boys . . . both will get into his hair. The gnats will get into the paint and either be lifted out or painted into the scene; small boys are not so easy to detach. Sooner or later, after thoughtful poppings of bubble-gum in the artist's ear the small boy will ask. . . .

Whatcha doin'?

I'm drawing a tree.

What kinda tree?

Wait and see.

Don't wanta wait . . .

Wanta know now.

It'll be more fun

If I show you how.

I'll draw the trunk

And I'll draw the bough.

I'll draw the leaves

And the shade below.

There, it is finished.

Now do you know?

Sure, I know . . .

I can see it plain.

God, how often

I've asked in vain,

What are you doing?

I'm drawing a tree,

Your tree of life.

What kind will it be?

Sorry, Son, you must

Wait and see.

You can help me draw it,

Leaf and bough.

But what will it be?

You can't know now,

But twig by twig,

Branch and leaf,

Flower of love

Or fruit of grief,

Bark of hope,

Thorn of strife,

We are drawing

Your tree of life.

There will come a day

Soon or far

When you will know

What tree you are,

Gnarled and stunted

Or tall and fine.

It is *you* who draw it,

Line by line.

I give the seed

The will to grow

But *you* draw the tree.

Thanks, God, now I know.

LATE-MADE FRIEND, CALIFORNIA

Knowing a land in which you were not reared,
Which childhood-time and youth have not endeared
Through intimate acquaintance with each phase
Of changing seasons and familiar ways
Is like the knowing of a late-made friend . . .
The story must read backward from the end.

You know the name, the face, the quirk of smile
But line by line the face, or mile by mile
The country, must be learned with loving care,
The gestures which reveal, all unaware,
Some secret of the pattern formative
Until the chosen friend to whom you give
Your heart, or chosen land in which you dwell,
Has told all of the tale the heart can tell.

I was born and reared in prairie land,
Western but not so western as this strand
Which sprawls in tawny beauty by a sea
That leads the eyes to blue infinity.
To choose between the two I would be loath.
Why wasn't I born twins . . . to know them both.

So I would learn the face of this good friend,
Counting a lifetime petty coin to spend
In knowing every mood, tracing each clue
Revealed in granite cliff, in shape and hue
Of cloud, in peak and shore, in wood and stone,
In tree and weed, in broken fossil bone,
And I would know its great or rowdy ghosts,
The tales, oft-told, which amberize those hosts
Of men and women who with blood and toil
Left nuggets of their hearts in golden soil.





CALIFORNIA BOY, SEQUENCE

I'm glad I was reared where I was reared. The windblown life of a prairie boy

Is filled with a tumble-weed sort of fun and a chancey lusty varied joy. I keep those days in my Memory Room in a highly special sort of place. Increasingly dear with the added years that pass like rocket-planes through space.

But, oh, I wish I had been a boy ranging the trails of this Golden State Knowing the land as only a boy can know with a love that is intimate In the formative years when the eager mind is plastic, receptive as a sponge.

Chum of the vast Pacific Shore where the great green stallion breakers plunge

Like herds stampeding before the storm when the wind is a wolf-cry shrill and wild,

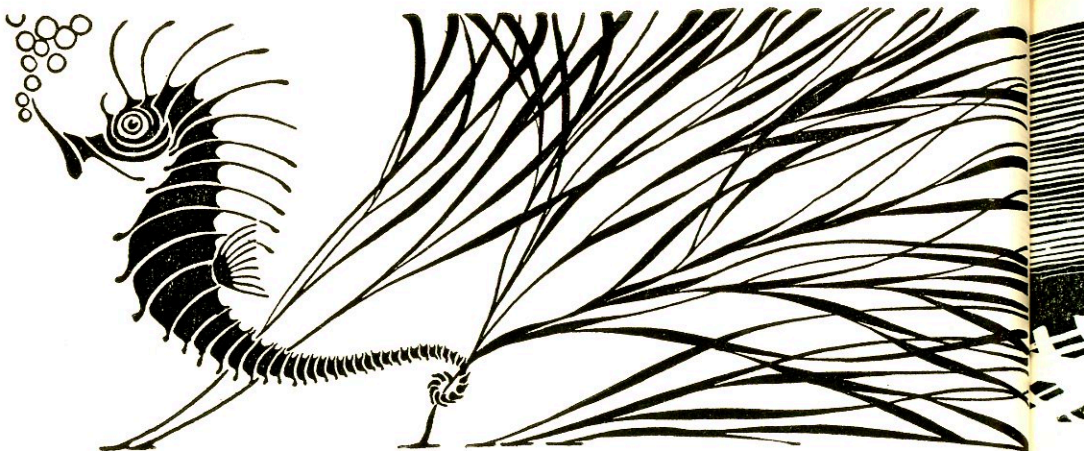
When gods and ghosts and phantom ships and mermaids live in the dreams of a child;

Ships and sails and shells and sharks, the knowledge of moons and the moody tides,

The mystery and magic of Neptune's world where the old Leviathan abides

To have the salt of the sea in blood that thirsts for the taste of other seas,

To hear the songs from tropical shores that echo in every sea-borne breeze;



To laugh with the gulls and swim with the seals, to go far out with the
fishing fleet;
To follow the wind-eroded trails that were worn by the padres' patient
feet.
To salvage boyish pirate's loot, flotsam, jetsam and trash and trove;
To know the ocean's varied moods, and the name of each point and reef
and cove;
To meet the ships from the Orient bearing cargoes of chests and
bales,
Fins of sharks and birds' nest soup, *bêche-de-mer* and hearts of whales;
To prowling in the skeletons of wrecks bleaching and weathered by sun
and wind;
To know the life of the cliff and shore, creatures feathered and furred
and finned;
To make a wish with a boy's strong faith on a star-fish found as the first
star beamed
In the hour of dusk, and repeat the wish on the sky-star's light that
softly gleamed,
"Star-light, star-bright," mystic words that boys have chanted since man
began,
"Star-fish, star-wish, please come true!" (and the wish comes true, as
wishes can).
To hear the speech of the tattooed men who come with the ships and
speak strange tongues,
To feel the spray on my wind-burned face and the salt and iodine in my
lungs.



I wish that I might have known this life as an eager boy with a dream-swirled mind,

Planning the day when I'd stowaway and the fair far Island that I'd find.
Frisco (that's what they called it then) with its gaudy, bawdy lusty life,
San Diego and Monterey, Skid Row's riots and rowdy strife.

How I'd have loved the tall tales told by men who had been in the
Caribbees,

Tales of murder and lust and loot, salt-tanged songs of the Seven Seas;
To sniff the smells of Fisherman's Wharf, lobsters, oysters and clams
and crabs,

To gorge till my buttons busted off on octopus, chowders and fried
sand-dabs,

To rove and range like the raffish gulls, cliff and inlet and reef and pool;
To learn of the seas and the folks of the sea in the wide blue pages of
Nature's school.

I'm loyal to the land where I was reared but a chap may dream and have
his say,

So, I'll voice my plaint and speak my piece, "Why wasn't I triplets,
anyway?"

FALLING STARS

Where old St. Peter guards the gates of Heaven's vast expanse
The falling stars and meteors with sudden flare and glance
Are cherubs scratching matches on the seat of Peter's pants.





A QUESTION OF BRAVERY

Son, you say us pioneers was brave. Well, in our way
We was. This may sound funny, what I'm going to say,
But in another light we wasn't. We're a breed
That knows our family tree is just a tumble-weed.
We're *movers-onners* not *stay-putters* like the folks
That roots deep in the soil to stay like elms and oaks.
We don't like routine or the safe and settled ways
That most folks needs to fill their span of living days.
Security and real estate and all those things
Is just like clipping feathers on a wild duck's wings.
The *follow-uppers* reap the grain of fields we clear,
But we don't mind too much. The things that we hold dear
Lies just beyond the hill, and when we cross that hill
Well, there's another and another one until
We reach the furthest West that we can go.
We slow down with the years, so here we stay. We know
That these *stay-putting* folks has plenty courage, too,
Doing the dull and needful things there is to do
To build a nation up and make it strong and great.
When us folks *gotta go* we *gotta go*. Some wait.

Sometimes I take a walk down to the city zoo
And see the wolves and bears and tigers looking through
The bars or pacing back and forth and back and forth,
Or see the caged wild birds when flocks is flying north,

I'd like to have a key and turn those poor things loose.
Us pioneers is kin-folks to the wild gray goose.
We hear the call, and when we hear it something starts
To gnawing and complaining somewhere in our hearts
And there's no rest nor peace short of the final grave.
You see, Son, there's so many different ways of being brave.

CANDID CAMERA, LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles,
Monstrous jig-saw puzzle of a city
Dropped from the stratosphere
To splatter over the landscape
For miles and miles and miles
And miles and miles
And miles.

SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco,
Aristocrat of manner,
Splendid with jewels,
Groomed to the last hair,
The raffish Duchess . . .
With a stevedore lover.

HOLLYWOOD AND VINE

Flotsam and jetsam. . . .
Hollywood gets 'em.

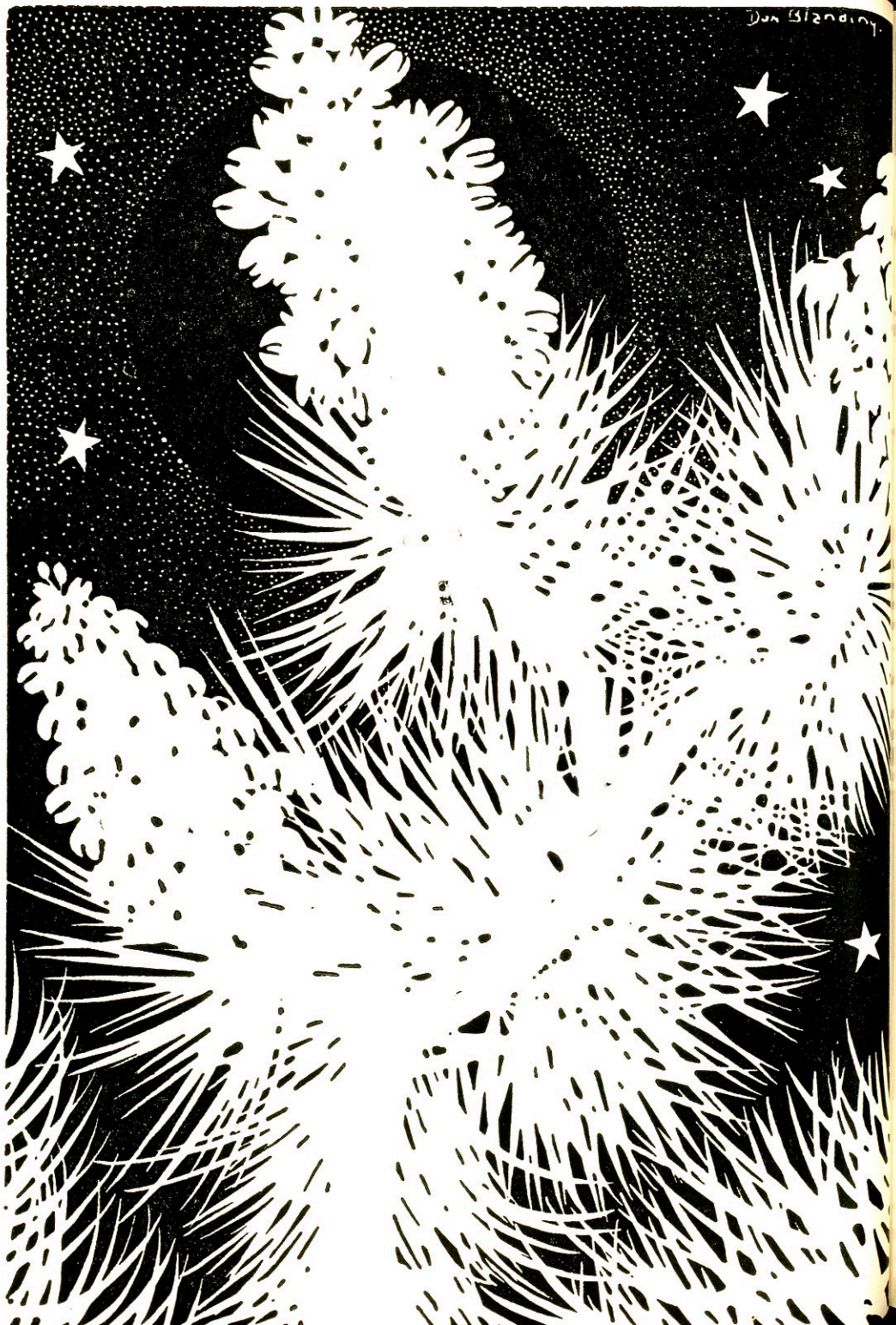
WEST BORN

Born in the West, reared in the West,
Western in heart and mind,
I've searched the North, the East and South
For something I could not find.
Beauty I found, splendor I found,
Sorrow and love and mirth,
But the sense of homeness . . . that I find
Only in Western earth.

I stand in the presence of snow-capped peaks
Where the silence is like a prayer
And free my heart to a glad release
Like a hawk on the desert air.
I seek the comradely ghosts of youth
On the trails of a younger day
And the years are shed like the autumn leaves
That the West-wind blows away.

Here are the mountains that gave my heart
Courage and urge to climb;
Redwoods taught me to see my life
As an inch in the miles of Time.
Here are the oceans and here the shores
That rhythm'd my pulse of life,
Ebb of tides and flood of tides,
Strife and calm and strife.

Deserts taught me a sense of peace
Primal and vast and deep
Where thunder is only a transient moan
In the spell of a tranquil sleep.
Born in the West, reared in the West,
Western in flesh and heart,
I've loved the world with a comrade's love
But the West is a shrine apart.



IVORY PRAYER

Desert Joshua Tree Flowers

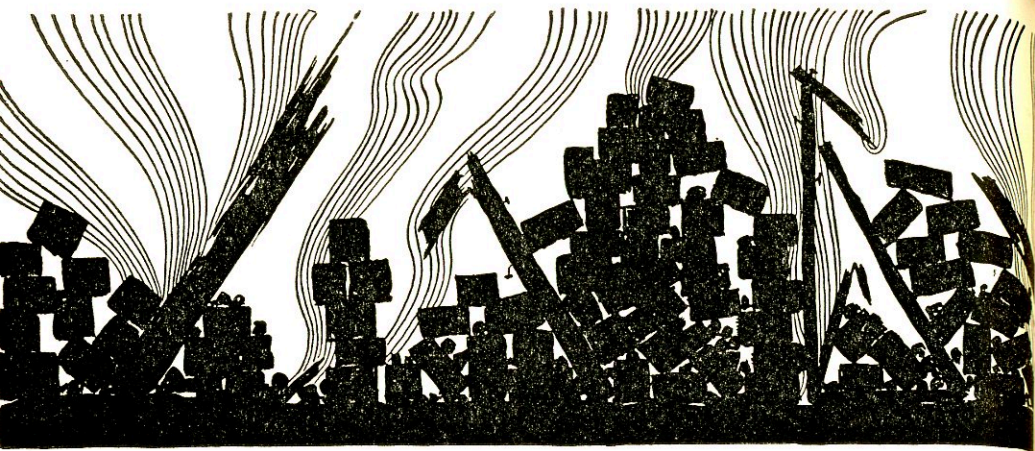
Out of its bleak and lonely heart,
Out of its stark despair
The desert Joshua lifts gaunt arms
To offer ivory prayer.

Out of a night of loneliness
After a tragic day
I found white blossoms in my heart
And learned to pray.

THE IMMEDIATE WINE

Do not be frantic, Heart. I know . . . I know,
However long the days, they pass too soon.
Dusk's ghostly ashen shadows haunt the noon;
Foreboding darkness chills the afterglow.
Must midnight walk while valiant trumpets blow
Announcing dawn? Must dawn's bright notes be strewn
In dissonance on cadences that swoon
While twilight's mystic rhythms pulse and flow?

This hour's cup is wet against my lips.
With this immediate wine my mouth is stained.
What matter if tomorrow's flagon drips
In shattered crimson. Must this wine be strained
Through fear's thin mesh? With slowly pleased sips
Or thirsty draughts, I'll drink. The cup is drained!



FROM BROKEN STONES

The earth shuddered
Like the skin of a horse
Under the sting of an annoying fly.
The houses of men
Crashed about their heads.
Many dreams went up in flames.
There was a numbed paralysis,
A horror too great for crying,
A bewildered weariness,
A lethargy of despair.

A man rose and spoke,
"Are we buzzards to gorge on dead memories,
Or maggot-men to feed on carrion?
Are we stray dogs howling among the ruins?
We are sons and daughters of pioneers.
What can we build from the splintered timbers of yesterday
Against tomorrow's storms . . .
For they will come,
And they will pass
As this day passes.
Paper is burned by fire.
Steel is tempered in it.
Today is here,

What shall we build from its broken stones?"
His words were echoed by the many
Until the great valiant cry
Blew like a strong fresh wind
Over the city
Clearing the smoke-reddened eyes of the people.
With stark, unflinching clarity
They saw today
And beyond the day the tomorrow and tomorrows.

From charred timbers
And broken stones
They builded
A greater city.

NOVEMBER ROAD

Gaunt trees, gray sky, a spent day waning.
Dark hills, lone wind, a long road through the dusk.
Thin cry of a night bird, an ebb-tide draining.
No light but the wan glow of an old moon's husk.

Blown clouds, storm's threat, the shy stars hiding.
Dim eyes, dim trail, a blurr of phantom grays.
Slow feet, sad heart, no star guiding.
Gay friends of the gay roads gone far ways.

Lone man, lone trail, the leaf-years falling.
Road's bend, steep hill, blind climb in the night.
Heart leaps! Heart hears a clear voice calling.
Heart knows at the road's end there burns a light.





OLD SYCAMORES

Sycamores are very much a part of the California scene. People with tidy minds usually don't like sycamores because the trees shed leaves regardless of season. Other people love them because they provide a suggestive nostalgic touch of Indian Summer otherwise missing in Southern California.

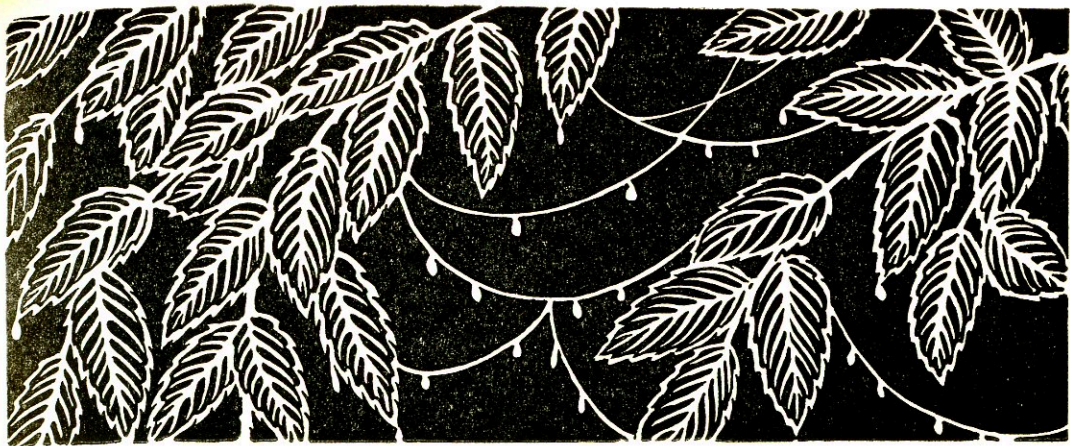
Ella, the daughter, nagged and nagged and nagged
At the old man. His patient shoulders sagged
Beneath the weight of words that weary years
Had heaped upon him. Helpless futile tears
Formed behind his lids. He winked them back
And with gnarled fumbling fingers closed the sack
Of brown tobacco, put the corn cob pipe away.
His dimmed hurt eyes stared at the golden day.
"Pa, you're worse'n them dratted sycamores
Scattering dead leaves around, making chores
For me. Lord knows, I've got enough to do
Without that old tobacco trash that you
Spill on the rug. And raking after them durned trees.
Leaves and tobacco! I've got callouses on my knees
From raking and picking, stooping and picking and sweeping.
Sometimes I feel like setting down and weeping.
I won't stand it. I *won't*. I tell you one sure thing . . .
Them trees is coming down *before another spring*.
If you got to smoke . . . smoke out in the yard
And don't smell up these curtains. It's too hard,
Raking and picking, sweeping and stooping and raking."

The old man slowly rose, trembling and shaking
As though the threatened axe had struck into his flesh.
He stumbled to the yard where shifting shadow-mesh
Of leaves wove gold and sable patterns on the lawn.
With slow-paced toil he worked until the sun had gone
To setting, gilding the trees with wine-red sheen.
No trespassing leaf defaced the lawn's monotonous green.

"Ella," he said, "I hate to ask you this, but please,
If I keep all the leaves picked up around the trees
And quit my smoking and do what little chores
I can to help, will you keep these old sycamores
Until I'm gone? It won't be very long, you know.
They're about the only old friends left, and, so
I promise to be good and neat. Please, daughter, *please?*"
His plaintive voice was echoed by the evening breeze
Among dry branches adding quavered plea to plea.
"Promising ain't doing," Ella said, "We'll see. We'll see."

Spring came, and summer. Autumn glory flared and turned,
While in the tidy neighborhood the bonfires burned
Like fragrant pyres.

In Ella's yard the leaves came down
In windblown drifts, undisciplined, unchecked and brown.
Within the house a space of rug was left unswept,
While by an empty chair a lonely woman bleakly wept.



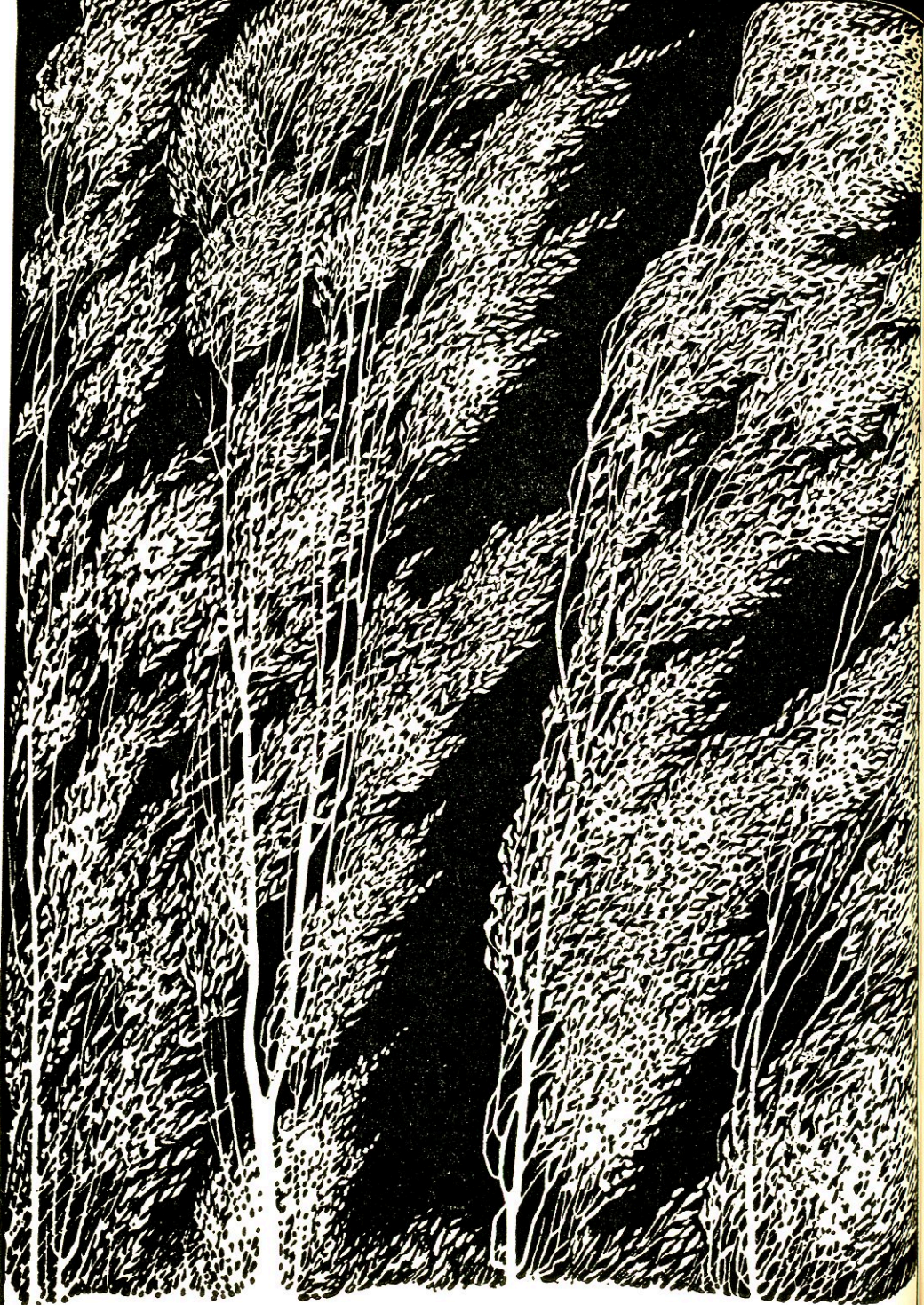
TEARS OF THE MOON

"There is no water on the moon, you know,"
Declared the man who studies stars and skies.
"Of course," the poet said, "for long ago
She emptied all the tears that stung her eyes.

She wept with joy for beauty of the dreams
That man has dreamed and wrought with his own hands.
Again she wept to hear his maniac screams
And see the ruins given to the sands.

She sighed with lovers and their moon-sworn vows.
She mourned above the Mother and her Son.
She grieved for bodies on the hang-tree's boughs,
She wept to watch wars' bloody rivers run.

She watches still. Her pallid face is drawn
With silent pain uneased by word or cry.
And she will watch until Time's final dawn.
But she can only sorrow . . . her eyes are dry."





TALK WITH A TREE

Did you ever talk with a tree (I said *with* a tree)?

You ask it your questions and wait for its cryptic replies.

It speaks in a sign-language understood by the heart

In an idiom, silent and subtle, heard by the eyes.

Talk with a tree, it will answer the questions you ask.

Talk with an oak, it will tell you of power and strength.

Talk with a dog-wood, its answer is beauty of blooms.

A pine tells the tale of its lightning-and-storm riven length.

Talk with a joshua tree in the desert's bleak waste,

It will tell you of silence. A cypress will speak of the sea.

The orange groves speak of the budding, the yielding of fruit.

Eucalyptus will sing you a song of the wind's melody.

Talk with a giant Sequoia . . . ask about life.

It will tell of a seed that entered the mothering sod.

It will talk of a blue-print for growing, incredibly drawn,

Placed in the heart of the seed by the Gardener God.

It will tell of the centuries passing like fugitive hours

As a seedling fought valiantly upward and upward for light.

It will tell you that time is a yardstick for timorous men,

That days are Eternity's inches divided by night.

It will speak of an alchemy mixing dark earth and cool rain

With the gold of the sunlight, transmuting to sap, heart and bark.

It will tell of the seasonal rhythm, the calendar's script,

Written in tree-rings, recording the light and the dark.

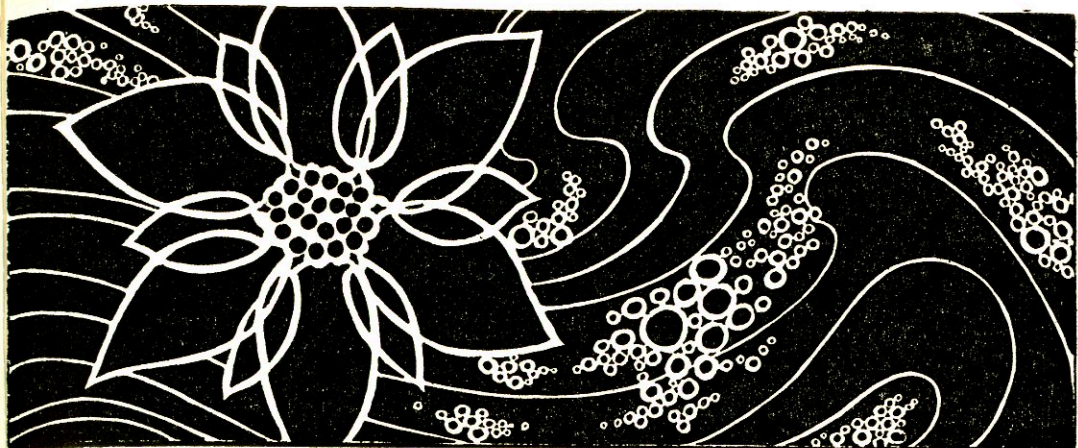
It will tell of the tree's reconversion to life-giving soil
To be used and re-used when the soul leaves the body behind,
When the time of the pattern of growth is completed, fulfilled,
And the blue-print withdrawn to be filed in the Infinite Mind.

Talk with a tree when your mind is bewildered and lost.
Ask and be silent. A voice will tell of the Plan
Which places a marvelous knowledge of growth in a seed
Like the spirit of faith in the wondering heart of a man.
Follow the plan when you find it, reach up to the sun;
Resist it and stay in the prisoning clutch of the clod.
Learn from a seedling the secret of ultimate growth.
Talk with a tree . . . for it can tell you of God.

SEQUOIA SKETCH

All afternoon the golden combs of sunlight
Carded the wool of shadows beneath the trees.
Sunset drew the floss into long skeins
For dusk to weave her evening dress
Embroidered with star-brilliants.

.
The crescent moon was a silver brooch
Fastening a chiffon cloud-scarf
On the gracious breast of night.



I'M GLAD YOU ASKED ME

"Why do you no longer write of love?"

You asked the question . . . and I asked myself,

"Why do I no longer write of love?"

Have passing years exiled it to the shelf

Where outworn things are stacked against the day

When shambling junk-men carry them away?"

"I've sung the pain of love, the joy, the grief,

The mask that passion wears to mimic love,

The ecstasy that passes all belief,

The classic vows sworn to the moon above.

Romance, lust and unrequited yearning . . .

Have these departed past hope of returning?"

"Why do I no longer write of love?"

My heart is pulsing with its old-time rhythm,

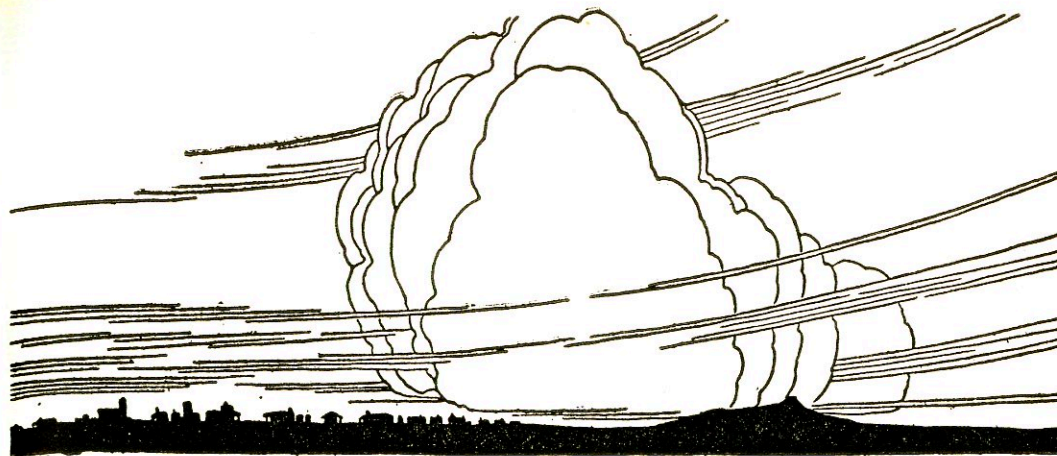
The nightingale, the spring, the stars, the dove . . .

I find my thoughts are still enchanted with them.

I know now why the lack of love-lorn sonnet . . .

We do not hail the street-car . . . when we're on it.





GHOST TOWN ROMANCE

Who remembers John Daschon?
Where was he born, how did he die?
Did he know Marie Monroe
Beside whose bones his dead bones lie?
Nothing of history, nothing of fame . . .
Only boards with the date of birth,
Date of death and the lettered name
In the lonely ghost-town's ghost-town earth.

Was it by chance they were buried here
Side by side so long ago?
Were they lovers, were they dear?
Who can tell what I want to know?
I like to think that John Daschon
Knew and loved Marie Monroe.
Perhaps he died a hero's death
For love of her, oh, long ago.

I like to dream that fond Marie
Pined and died for the love of John
And asked to lie beside his grave
In mutual earth for ever and yon.
I like to think that in the night
Their ghosts rise up from the ghost-town earth

To know an hour of phantom love,
A gay mad hour of love and mirth.

Here are the boards with the faded names,
John Daschon and Marie Monroe.
Were they lovers? Were they dear?
I'll never know.

ASPIRIN

My intellectual friend picked up The Book.
"This talk of God is merely opiate,
A mental sedative to mitigate
The pain of stark reality." His look
Sprayed me with mocking scorn. He deftly took
The razor-blade of wit to mutilate
My page of faith. He fished the intimate
Pool of my secret heart with baited hook.

I met his arguments with teasing grin,
"Last night," I said, "a headache seared your brain
And stoic you asked for an *aspirin*,
Yet you deny a heart its balm for pain.
Faith is no anodyne nor insulin;
Faith is a healing . . . never sought in vain."

SEE-SAW SEA

I went to the sea and saw today.

(I was weary and I was gray)

I went to the sea and saw much more
Than waves and a stretch of sandy shore,
Which was all that I ever saw before,

As I hadn't learned the way

To see

The sea.

I went to the sea and saw today.

(It washed my heart of its weary gray)

I saw the Power behind the wave,
I sensed the Power that took and gave,
I saw the sea as the womb and grave.

Grave and womb,

Birth and tomb.

Why be weary . . . why be gray?

Tomorrow's flood will wash away

Memory of the ebb today.

Cresting wave and undertow,

Here we come and there we go,

Gone in sorrow, tears and pain

Only to be born again.

Ebb of breath,

Glow of mirth,

Gasp of death,

Cry of birth,

See-saw sway,

Ebb and flow,

The endless way

That life must go.

See-saw

Sea.



SUGGESTION TO TOURISTS

If you tire of scenery, houses and greenery,
Flora and fauna and movie stars' palaces,
Palms and hibiscus and other promiscuous
Objects of interest like Iowan galluses,
Shift your attention and start a collection
Of signs by the roadside, they're strange and amusing,
They're novel, amazing and quite worth your gazing,
Although just at first, you'll find them confusing.

Hamburgers, lamb-burgers, ram, spam and clamburgers,
(you may not believe it, but . . . Forever Ambergers)
Lobster and shrimp burgers,
Pallid and limp burgers,
Something called nut-burgers
(Heaven knows *what* burgers),
Chili-and-cheese burgers,
Sodden with grease burgers,
Venison, quail burgers,
Ruddy or pale burgers,
Salmon and trout burgers,
With-or-without burgers,
"With-or-without" meaning onions or pickles,
Lettuce and mustard and relish that tickles
Your palate and makes you forget that these coarse burgers

Could possibly be either seagull or horse burgers.
Husky and fat burgers,
Stingy and flat burgers,
Fried, broiled or barbecued
"Best that you ever chewed,"
French burgers . . . what are they? I've never tried them.
Maybe they're burgers with truffles inside them.
Catnip-and-mouse burgers (fashioned for Persians),
Birdseed-and-worm burgers (feathered pet versions).
Pup-burgers streamlined for canine consumption
With Vitamin-B to increase growl-and-gumption.
Hash burgers, stew burgers, all-over-goo burgers,
I suppose that Australians have kangaroo burgers.
Double-deck twin-burgers, goop-on-your-chin burgers,
Sex-appeal items called "Hollywood Sin-Burgers."
Real work-of-art burgers, tastily edible,
Anything, everything, simply incredible,
Proving one thing beyond quibble or question,
Californians have ptomaine-proof cast-iron digestions.

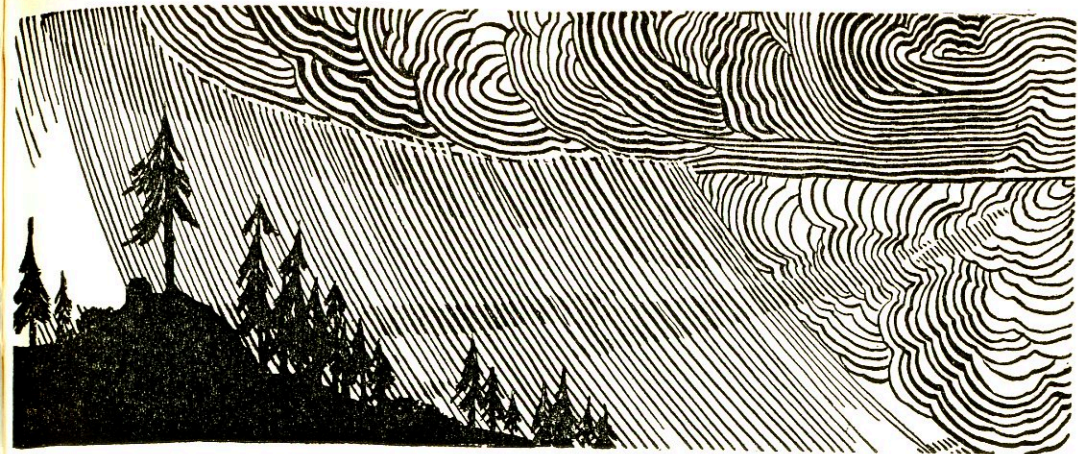
CANDID CAMERA, PALM SPRINGS

Where the golden needles of the sun
Tattoo freckles
On the expensive epidermis
Of movie stars.

CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA

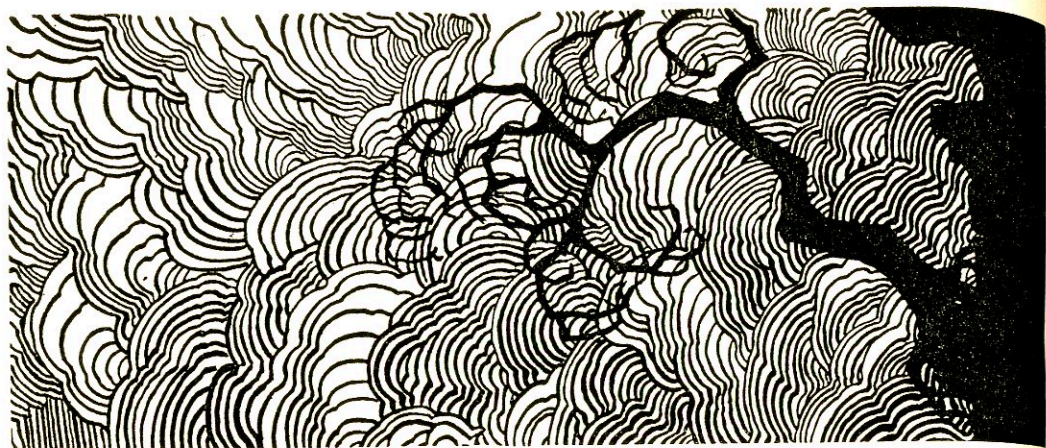
Literary . . . musical . . .
And Very Who's-whosical.





SHASTA

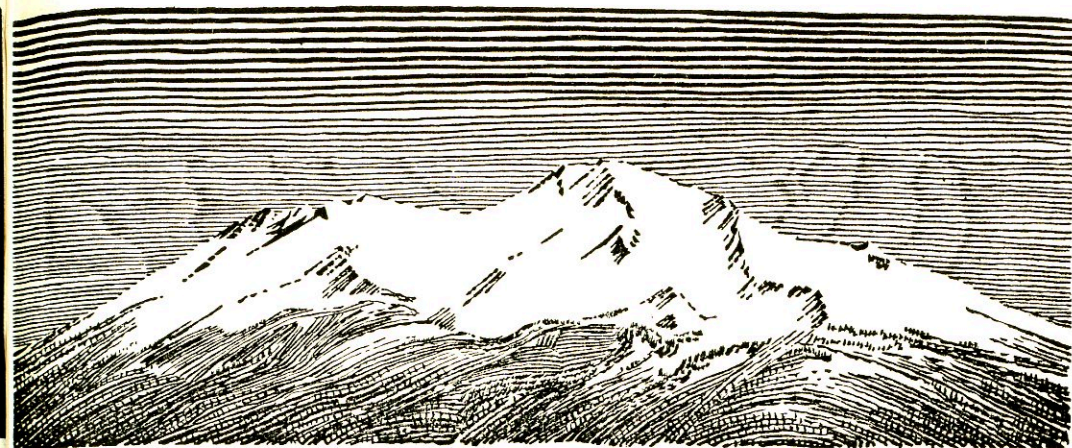
All day we had traveled through grandeur, forests and rivers,
Valleys of shadowy purple that sent quickened shivers
In sensuous ripples through nerves attuned to the beauty
Of colors, sky-turquoise, fern-jade, lake-cobalt and fruity
Hues of azaleas, marshmallow clouds, meadows misted
With sunlight and shadow. All day I had firmly insisted,
"Yes, this is splendid, but wait for that hour of wonder . . .
Mount Shasta. At dawn it is lovely, but lovelier under
The moon's incandescence; yet, glory of glory, the hour
Of sunset when all of the rainbows of time seem to shower
Their prisms in prodigal spending . . . a sight unforgettable."
One skeptical friend made the comment, "It would be regrettable
If there *should* be clouds when we passed." I protested, "Don't fear it.
The peak, the great mountain, knows when its lovers are near it.
We'll see it." My pessimist friend gave a snort of frank doubting.
"A mountain's a mountain," he said, "how can our little outing
Affect the conditions that govern the rules of the weather?
How could this mountain possibly know . . . or care . . . whether
We saw it or missed it. You're simply being *poetic*."
I knew with a sureness of knowing that verged on prophetic
That Shasta, the Chaste One, the Virgin, the Splendid and gracious,
Would welcome our tribute of love. From her throne in the spacious
Blue temple of sky she would give us the joy of her blessing,
For mountains gain souls through the hearts of the humans expressing



Their wonder and awe with their prayers, unspoken or spoken,
Which are left at these altars of beauty, intangible token
To give through the years an identity, godlike, inspiring,
Lifting our thoughts to white shrines of exalted desiring,
Making us taller, flooding our lives with their power,
Waking awareness of kinship with God for an hour.

The miles sped behind us, we crested the last ridge concealing
The picture awaited so eagerly. Now the revealing!
The mountain was mantled with clouds from base to the summit.
Somber and brooding, with veils of gray mist streaming from it
Like thoughts of dark anger, warning against all invasion.
The sun flung its glory of wooing in ardent persuasion
Joining my prayers. Could the moody goddess deny me?
(I heard the sly chuckle of mockery sounding near by me),
Yet, I knew in my heart as well as I knew my own being
That the mountain would hear.

Could it be a trick of our seeing?
Was it a mood of the wind, a whim of Fate's urging?
The clouds slowly parted! We saw a white vision emerging,
White beyond whiteness of earth, the whiteness of fire
That circled the Grail, the whiteness of God's own desire
Commanding "Let there be light!" and, Lo! there was light
From forested base to the crest of the ultimate height,
Light sudden-blinding, light diamond-glinting, light prism-flashing,
Brittle light twinkling in crystals, opal-light crashing
In color harmonics, chords and arpeggios sounding,



Lightning of dazzlement, blazing, reflecting, rebounding,
From snow-field to cliff, from cliff to the clouds and returning,
Such light as though Heaven itself were consumed in its burning.
For a moment we saw the Fair Goddess, the Chaste One, far-gleaming,
Clothed in the glorious nakedness of snow-flesh. The streaming
Loom of the sun wove a garment of radiant brightness,
Golden and crimson and purple to veil the stark whiteness
From profaning mortals.

Sharply our hearts stilled their beating,
Our lips mutely forming a prayer, unuttered, entreating
The goddess to grant us the moments prolonging the rapture
Of seeing such beauty immortal, an instant to capture
A cameo carved on our memory to cherish and treasure.

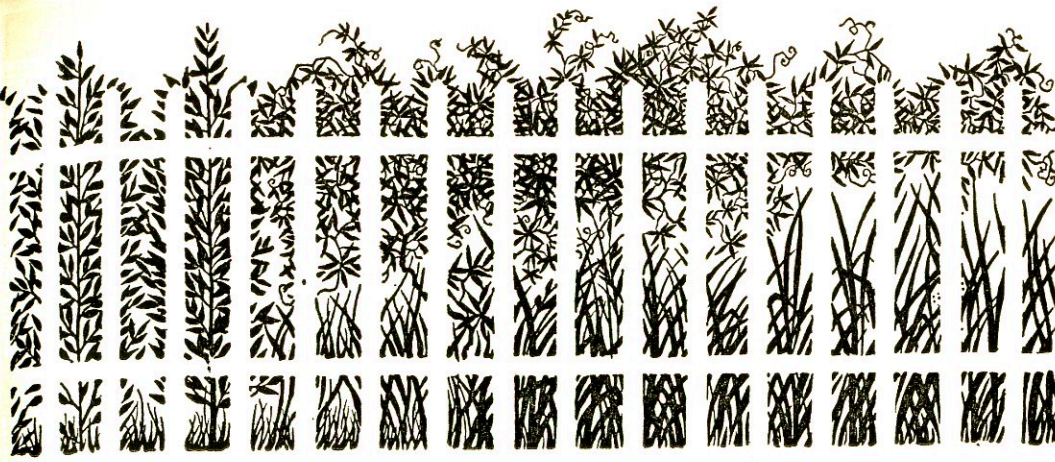
Slowly, as though to the sound of the spheres' starry measure,
The mountain withdrew from our sight; dark draperies enfolded
The beauty that time and the Infinite Sculptor had moulded.

In our hearts burns a white-gleaming jewel, a vision that hovers,
An earth-goddess baring her breasts to her reverent lovers.

WORDACHROME IN SIBILANTS. HOLLYWOOD

Searchlights slash the sable satin of the sky
Like monstrous crystal scissors
Snipping slender silver threads
Of sequin stars.





THE SLIP

She was a woman with a garden-heart,

She measured distance by a picket fence
And time by seeds and blossoms' flowery chart.

She had no thought or dream of the immense
Calling of far names nor changing faces.

Her earth's equator was the village lane
Known to the intimate inch by daily paces.

Her yard was her only Castle Built In Spain.
All worry weeds and bramble thorns of fears
Met the quick expert snipping of her garden shears.

But Fate, a gardener, too, in her strange way

Planted cruel seeds to grow in gentle soil,
Vines with red hectic blooms to flush and sway

On cheeks whose only rouge was sun and toil.
"Go to the desert" was the stern command,

"Dry air and sleep and rest are what you need."
A frightened refugee sought alien land

To rid the garden of its alien seed.
The picket fence was changed to bare stark peaks
And bird-songs stilled where only stoic silence speaks.

The will to live was wilted by the heat
Of endless days, monotonous and long,
Her code would not permit her hand to cheat
The will of God. The desert wind's harsh song
Was savage mockery of the well-loved hymns
That rose nostalgic in her throat and died.
She saw the smoke-tree's gaunt and ashen limbs;
Remembering willows and her elms, she cried.
Even the salty solace of her tears knew drouth
And budding prayers shed withered petals in her mouth.

One day in desperate need of neighbor-talk
She made an errand serve her as a goad
To force her listless feet onto the walk
Which led in flinty roughness to the road.
She passed adobe huts in sandy yards
Where swarthy women looked with hostile gaze
(or so it seemed) with cactus plants for guard
Against intrusion of her foreign ways.
Her courage almost failed; she paused for breath.
If death had smiled she would have gladly welcomed death.

Her frantic eyes turned to a rubbish heap
Of rusted cans and bottles, desert trash.
In her heart she felt a sudden leap
For on the littered pile of muck and ash
She found a wilt-leafed red geranium,
A slip, no more . . . perhaps too late to save.
All unaware, her lips began to hum;
All unaware, her feet turned from the grave
With slip in hand back to her lonely room
Where, in her heart, her plant of hope began to bloom.

CHART

*The chart of my days of life I see,
The quick and the dead and the yet-to-be,
Traced by the branch of a pepper tree.*



AUNT CALLY IN CALLYFORNIA

In my book TODAY IS HERE I introduced Aunt Cally (Caledonia Abernathy), a very real person, to my friends. They liked her salty dark wisdom, her seasoned philosophy and pungent comments. So, I am bringing her to Callyfornia via these pages with more Aunt Callyisms. I could not exactly reproduce her spicy idiom so I have adapted it).

You know these hyeah caffyteeria places
Where folks goes to feed their faces,
They sho' is like a hongry man's idea of Heaven.
Why, Chile, they's mo' than forty-leven
Kinds o' food spread out befo' yo' gaze.
You goes 'round carryin' greaat big trays
An' you picks a bit o' this and a mite o' that
'Til they ain't room enuff fo' a mouse's hat
Left on that tray. Then you goes and finds a table
An' eats yo' way thru it all . . . if you is able.

Well, one day as I was kinda wanderin'
Past them loaded tables I got to ponderin';
You know, this hyeah caffyteeria is like the blessin's o' the Lord.
As the Good Book says, "befo' you is spread a bountiful board."
Everything you wants, an' some things you don't even *know*
You wants til you sees 'em spread out, row on row.
They's hot bread an' light bread an' spoon bread an' cawnpone,
They's collard greens an' mustard greens . . . cooked with a hambone.
They's grits an' gravy, black-eyed peas, an' spare ribs and sidemeat.
They's taters, mashed an' baked an' fried, both kinds . . . white and
sweet.
They's rutabagas, string beans, butter beans an' candied yams,
They's long sweetnin', short sweetnin', sweet puhservees, jellies, jams,
They's poke chops, cracklin's an' chittlins, an' possum, too.
Fried chicken . . . ummmm-ummm! an' catfish an' chicken stew
With dumplin's . . . oh man! an' giblets an' cawn fritters,
An' backbone an' souse-meat an' crawdads an' sich critters.
They's roas' duck an' roas' goose an' roas' turkey, if you crave it.
If you asks fo' the gizzard, Chile . . . yassuh, they'll save it.
They's fried ham an' baked ham an' sausage an' pigs' feet,
They's angel cake an' chocklut cake with frostin', *that* sweet.

They's three kinds o' ice cream, vanilly, chocklut an' strawberry.
They's mo' things than I could name if I had me a dickshunerry.
Here they is. Come an' git it. The Lord's blessin's. Pick an' choose.
Trouble is with lots o' folks, they sings them ol' complainin' blues.
They wants the vittles *brung to 'em*,
With sweet music *sung to 'em*.
They's too doggone lazy to even spread
The butter on they *own bread*.
They wants to be *spoon-fed*.
Yassuh!

AUNT CALLY ON "SPENDIN' THE DAY"

I ain't so quick
At 'rithmetic
Cause I got only ten fingers, an', Lord knows,
They's usually busy washin' clothes
Or tendin'
To sewin' an' mendin'
Or kneedin' dough
An' so
When I got some figgerin' I wants done
I calls my youngest daughter's li'l son,
Philly Chris . . . we calls him that cause he was born
In Phillydelphia on Christmas morn
An' he's as bright as *any* Christmas tree.
So, I says to him, "Come hyeah to me,
Philly Chris,
An' lissen close to this;
Better bring yo' paper an' yo' pencil, too,
Cause I got some figgerin' fo' you to do.
I knows that 'rithmetic
Ain't no trick
Fo' you at-all,
Even if you *is* small."
He grins an' skins his eyes at me so bright,
"Granny Cally, does I get a cooky if I does it right?"
I ain't foolin' him so slick,
He knows I ain't no good at 'rithmetic.
So I says to him, "Git that cotton outa yo' ear

An' lissen hyeah.
Lots o' times you hyeah folks say
They's spendin' the day . . .
Spendin' the day . . .
So I begins thinkin' this way;
If every second o' the day costs a *penny*
How many
Would it take to buy a *minute*?
He says, "Granny Cally, they's just *sixty seconds* in it
An' it costs you just *sixty cents* to buy it."
So I says, "This one's harder but you try it . . .
How much is a *hour* goin' to cost yo' Granny Cally?"
He sho' is bright cause he don't dilly-dally,
"*Thirty-six dollars . . .* an' now you'se goin' to say,
'How much is a *day*?' "
He figgers an' figgers, then he sho' nuff hollers,
"Why, Granny Cally, that's eight hundred an' sixty-fo' dollars."
An' I says, "Sonny,
That sho' is a mint o' money,
An' I been spendin' it like I was a millionaire.
I declare
That half-hour I spent fussin' over the back fence
With ol' Waterlily Spence
Warn't worth no *eighteen dollars* to me.
Naw, sirree!
Now, is I goin' to spend them precious dollars o' my days
In foolish ways
Like bubble-headed gals that paints their toes
An' buys flashy, sleazy clothes
That busts wide open at the seams
An' the color runs in streaks an' streams
An' the buttons all drap off the first time they's tubbed
An' washed an' scrubbed?
Naw, Suh. Believe me, Sonny,
Granny Cally's buyin' somethin' *durable* with *her* money.

AUNT CALLY ON "FREE AN' EQUAL"

My li'l grandson, Philly Chris, he sho' is bright,
He says to me the yuther night
When he's a-studyin' his lessons fo' next day,
"Granny Cally, in this book it say
That all men's born *free* an' *equal*. Is that true?"
When this boy asks me that, I'm tellin' you
It makes my ol' heart ache. His li'l eyes
Is trustin' me . . . an' I cain't tell no lies,
So, I says, "Sonny, you won't understan'
Just what I say 'til you is a growed-up man
An' maybe then you won't just rightly know.
Is men borned *free* and *equal*? Yes, that's so;
You is FREE to live . . . if you can stand the strain
An' you is EQUAL to the grief an' pain.
You is *equal* to the next man . . . at the start,
Free to love an' laugh . . . an' break yo' heart.
Yeah, evvy man on earth is *free* an' *equal*
When he's borned . . . then comes what folks calls the "sequal."

That *sequal* thing is all yo' years o' livin',
Learnin' about havin' an' takin' and givin',
Learnin' to be strong an' learnin' how to pray,
Learnin' that the Lord's way ain't always yo' way,
Learnin' to do the most with what you got,
Learnin' not to do like ol' Mrs. Lot
An' look back, grievin', over yo' shoulder,
Learnin' as I had to learn, as you git older
That folks that *seems* to have the easy ways
Is just the very folks that sometimes pays
The *most* fo' *nuthin'*. People is just like trees,
Some sways an' flutters mighty pretty *in a breeze*
But when it comes a *storm* . . . blam! down they goes.
They just ain't *deep-rooted* like a tree that grows
Out on the rocks an' has to fight the weather.
Us mortals just ain't fitten' for judgin' whether
We's lucky or unlucky in our ways o' bein'.

Sometimes it takes years befo' we're seein'
Just how we fits into the Almighty Plan.

Now, you take Doctor Carver, he was a colored man,
Borned a slave, but, Son, his heart was *free*
To make hisself the man he prayed to be . . .
An' *equal* to the job. Son, that job was *tough*,
An' nearly all the way the road was mighty rough,
An' many times his pore o' head was in the dirt,
An' many times his heart was sick an' sorely hurt,
An' many times the clouds dimmed out the road ahead,
But, Son, he saw his job. He *done it*. Now, he's dead.
But when folks says his name . . . they says it *proud*.
He warn't content to be just *one o' the crowd*.
They's plenty mo' like him, Son, me an' you
Might think we got plenty cause fo' feelin' blue
But that don't git you nothin' in the end
But mildew in yo' brains; you got to bend
Yo' back beneath yo' burden *fo' a while*
'Til you learns to grit yo' teeth an' *smile*.
Then, when you smiles, that weight it seems to *lift*.
Then you learns to *brace yo'self* an' *shift*
That weary burden til it seems so light
You scarcely knows it's there, at all. *That's right*.

I knows, Son. Granny Cally *knows* how slow
An' long an' hard the road you's goin' to go.
An' Granny knows this, too, that you is *free*
To hang yo' burden on a weepin'-willer tree
An' let the willer do yo' share o' weepin'
Cause that's a willer's job. You *keep on keepin'*
Yo' eyes right on that road ahead
An' just remember what yo' Granny Cally said;
"You is *free* an' *equal* to the test o' joy . . . or sorrow.
Now, *git yo' lessons done fo' school tomorrow*.

TO THE DWELLERS IN TREE-TOAD TRELLIS

Marcus and Ruby Lytle

To the Folks who live at Tree-Toad Trellis
Where Tree-Toads palpitate their bellis,
Congratulations and good wishes
On your pots and pans and dishes,

BUT

Tell us, are they He-Toad Tree-Toads,
One-or-two-or-three-toed Tree-Toads?
Are there any She-Toad Tree-Toads?

Do they chirp arpeggios,

Tapping rhythm with their toes?

Are they spending twilight hours
Demonstrating "bees and flowers"?

Are they busy making Wee-Toads
Or will you have their sex-life vetoed?

Tell in rhythm, rhyme or prose

The number of your Tree-Toads' toes.

Tell us, though you use a sonnet,

How many toes has a Tree-Toad on it?





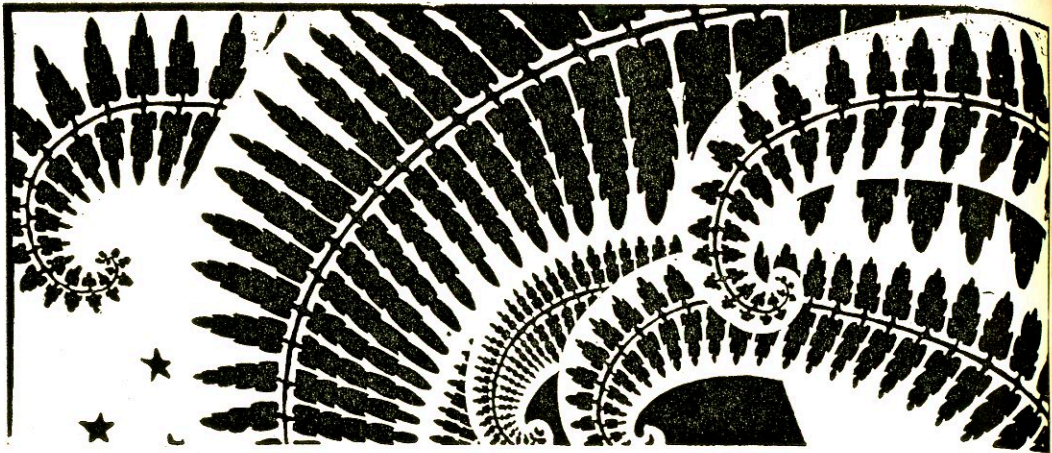
MOUNTAIN TALK

I wonder if in the night the God-Mountains speak,
Whitney to Shasta, brother to earth-sister peak,
Baldy to grim San Jacinto? Veterans all,
Remembering turbulent youth-time. Do they recall
Eons like hours, centuries blown down the wind,
Ages before the pulse of their arteries thinned?
Do tremors that intermittently ripple the earth
Betray rowdy chuckles and nudges of flesh-shaking mirth;
Are winds that suddenly breathe from their summits but sighs
For times when the gusts of their passion cycloned the skies,
When the virile surge of their potency flooded and burst
In lava and flame, when young seas were wine for their thirst?

Do they watch the antics of Lassen, the youngest, with smiles
Enjoying vicarious youth as they span the long miles
With silent communion, or do they express consternation
And sigh with lugubrious doubt, "*This new generation!*"

SIERRA PEAKS

Here in this immensity,
This high savage immensity of the mountain world,
Among the splintered snow-craggs of lightning-blasted peaks
I am no more than a morsel of meat
In the bared, broken fangs of the primal earth-wolf.



... AND WALK

"Take up thy bed and walk." The ancient phrase
In modern garb yet with the message plain
Sliced through the fog of lethargy and pain,
"Get up and walk." "*Walk?*" "*Walk!*" In toxic daze
I heard the words, insistent, blunt and curt.

Walk . . . with each sluggish muscle loathe to wake?
Walk . . . with each craven nerve evading hurt?

The habit-pattern seemed too strong to break.
The mind unwilling and the will too weak,
The goal too distant for the heart to seek.

A phantom voice, persistent as a clock
Tick-tocked the phrase. "*Get up . . . get up . . . and walk!*"
The body eased in comfort sought to balk
The urge to rise, too weary to unlock
The door to freedom with the heavy key
Of effort. With the subtlest sabotage
It whispered, "*What's the use . . . it's plain to see*
That hope is but a shimmering mirage.
You're ill . . . ill . . . ill. It is too late."
Again I heard the voice, importunate.
"*Walk.*" Some shred of valiance heard the plea
And, like a small weak seed in creviced stone,
Sent roots of faith through nerve and calcined bone,

Stirring the heart to frantic urgency.

One step. One step. One step. One step . . . and one.

Step . . . rest. Step . . . rest. Step. Step. Rest . . . step . . . and rest.

A pilgrimage of weariness begun,

A climb to some white-gleaming mystic crest.

One step. One prayer. One bead. One gleam of hope.

One . . . One . . . and One slim thread to twist a rope.

One step . . . the touch of sunlight on the face.

One step . . . the feel of earth beneath the feet.

One step . . . the scent of fern, cool forest-sweet.

One step . . . the call of blue enchanted space.

One block of steps . . . the gardens and the trees.

One mile . . . a friendly dog's companionship.

One hill . . . long conversation with a breeze.

Return . . . with sweat's good flavor on the lip.

One faith renewed. A journey well begun.

A rosary of steps. How joyously I count each one.

UNDERSTANDABLE IF

(One Giant Sequoia tree is over 3500 years old)

It would be quite understandable if

After more than 1,277,500 dawns

The Sequoia lifted a long bored sniff

And yawned some considerable yawns.

But this morning's sun brought its bright array

Of golden robes for the ancient green,

And the great tree glowed as though this day

Was the first it had ever seen.



CELESTIAL PUNCTUATION

Beetle Rock, Sequoia National Park

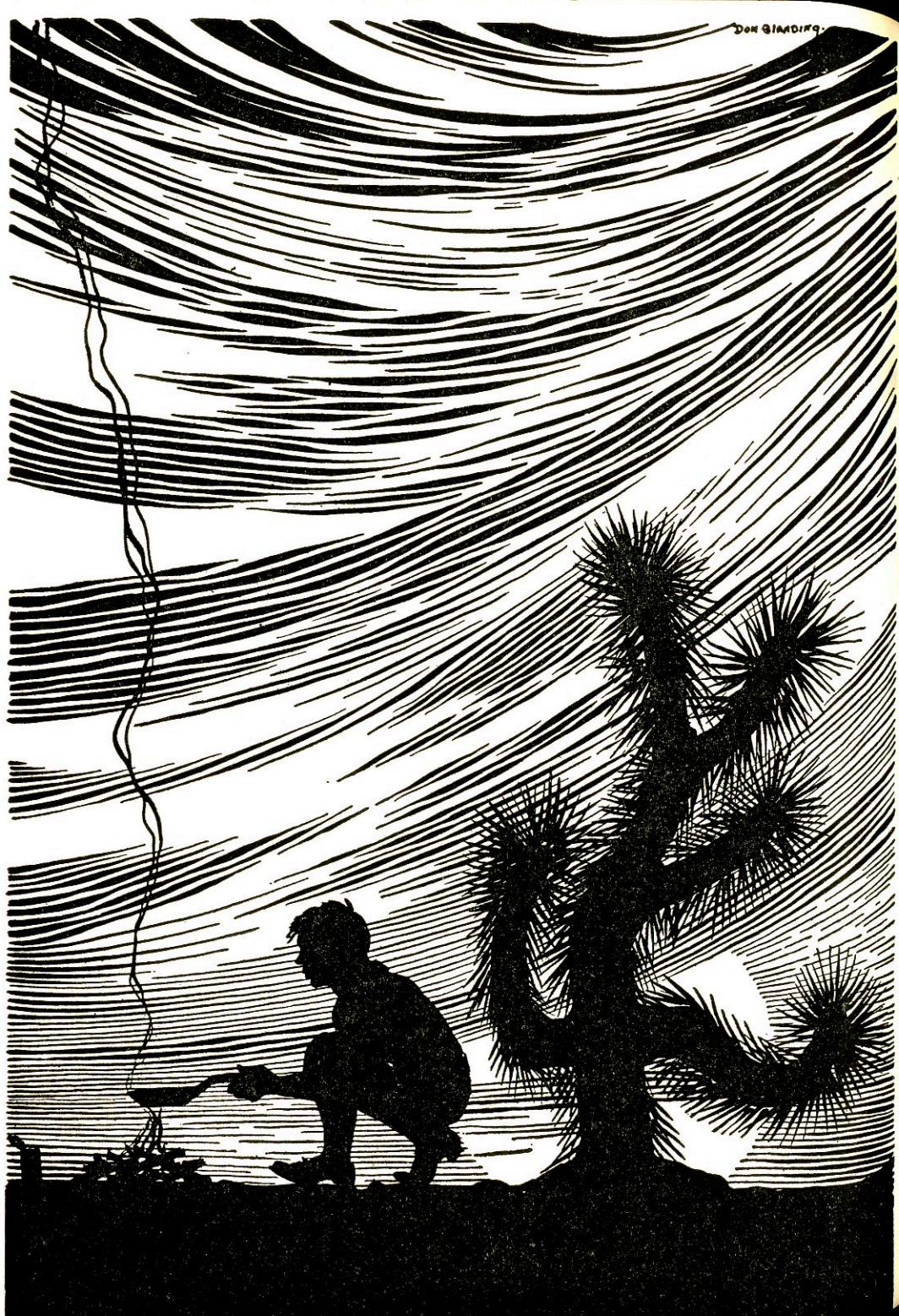
The dark poem of dusk
Is liberally punctuated with period-stars. . . .
A few bright planet-asterisks * * * *
And a slim golden comma,
The crescent moon.

HOW BIG IS A HEART?

(A small boy came up to me on the street and abruptly asked, "Say, Mister, how big is a heart?" I told him that I thought a heart was about as big as a fist, but I didn't say whose fist. He seemed satisfied, but I got to wondering just how big a heart is.)

How big is a heart? I'll look and see.
It must be *high*. Mine holds a tree,
A redwood tree whose silent might
Calmed my fears through an anguished night.
It's *higher still*, there's a snow-capped peak
That the urge of youth once bade me seek.
There's a blue small star in a blue vast sky.
Did you know that a heart could be so *high*?

How big is a heart? It must be *wide*.
Mine holds my home and the country-side
Where I was born. It must be *deep*.
Here are the graves where dead years sleep.
It must be *broad* and it must be *long*
To hold the dear and treasured throng
Of friends of every age and race.
It occupies such a *puny* space
Yet, when its limits are unfurled
A human heart *can* hold the world.





CALIFORNIA BOY, DESERT SEQUENCE

I am greedy for all of life, every phase of it, joy and pain.

Often and often I've wished that I had been quintuplets with one chief
brain

Radar-sensitive, gleaning all of the varied passions of varied selves

Paying for heights that one self scales with shadowed depths where
another delves.

One could have been a sybarite, gourmet-eager for spice and sauce,

Savoring life-wine's suave bouquet, rose of laughter and rue of loss.

One could build on a solid rock, one could follow the wild swan road,

One could dream and one could do and one could suffer ambition's goad.

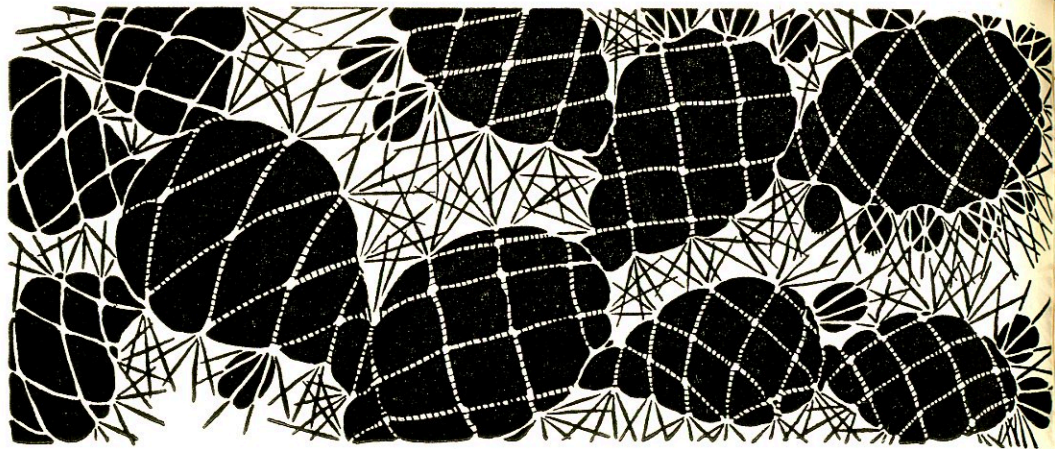
I wish that one of my multiple selves had been a boy of the desert world
Reading with wondering awe-filled eyes the ancient script of its life
unfurled

Through bone of fossil and weathered rock, telling of eons lost in time,
Book of granite and page of quartz, word of topaz and phrase of lime
Letter by letter as children learn, opening vistas of vast amaze.

I would have loved the desert trails, star-spiced nights and sun-
drenched days.

The mind of a boy is a plastic thing formed of wonder and curious
quest;

I would have had my young mind shaped by the glory and splendor of
Desert West.



The sculptor-wind would have chiseled thoughts as the driven sand
erodes the stone

To shapes fantastic and forms grotesque, gods familiar and gods un-
known.

I would have had for guides and friends "desert rats" to instruct my
eyes,

Old prospectors to show the trails to lone lost valleys where treasure
lies,

Caves with skeletons, shards and tools of men who followed a mystieried
call

To leave their record in pictographs, smoked and carved on the cliff
and wall.

I would have known that the primitive men who carved their legends
in glyph and rhyme

Were lost blood-brothers who tried, as I, to scrawl our names on the
fence of time.

A boy would dream great valiant dreams of high adventure and ancient
lore,

Mimicking battles and games and zest of the vanished men who had
gone before.

I think with envy of treasure trove that waits for the search of young-
ster hearts,

Spanish bullion in rotted chests, Indian relics of pots and darts.

Broken arrowhead, shaft of spear, mocking yellow of fool's gold glint,

Beryl and tourmaline, garnet, sard, black obsidian, agate, flint.



I would have traced the wagon trails of frontier days and have found
great pride

In a rusted knife or spur or coin, burro's shoe or branded hide,
A whiskey bottle left by the trail, tinted amethyst by the sun,
Or, treasure of treasures to a boyish heart, the grim notched butt of a
killer's gun.

I would have learned the desert's rules, old, inflexible, sternly just . . .
Heed them and live . . . that is, *perhaps*; flout them and blend with the
windblown dust.

I would have learned the desert's song, coyote's aria sung at night,
Husky *churr* of the cactus wren, shriek of hawk in bandit flight,
Castanets of the rattle snake, the brooding dove's insistent sob,
Kildeer's thin, shrill piping plaint, a tom-tom's far hypnotic throb.
Who-who-who—who-who of the great horned owl, the mocking bird's rhapsodic thrill,

And over, under and after all . . . the timeless silence, vast and still.

I would have known the secret life that threads the desert night and day,
Savage, brutal, dog-eat-dog, yet with an overnote, bright and gay.
Lizards gilding their tinted scales with the lacquer-gold of the desert
sun,

And the small shy things that venture forth for love and play when the
day is done,

The grim gray cactus armed with spears, holding beauty within its
heart



To give in tribute to desert-gods in the time that is marked on its mystic chart.

I would have danced the devil-dance with the whirlwinds swirling in maddened speed,
And followed mirage with its luring call, and raced with the raffish tumble-weed.

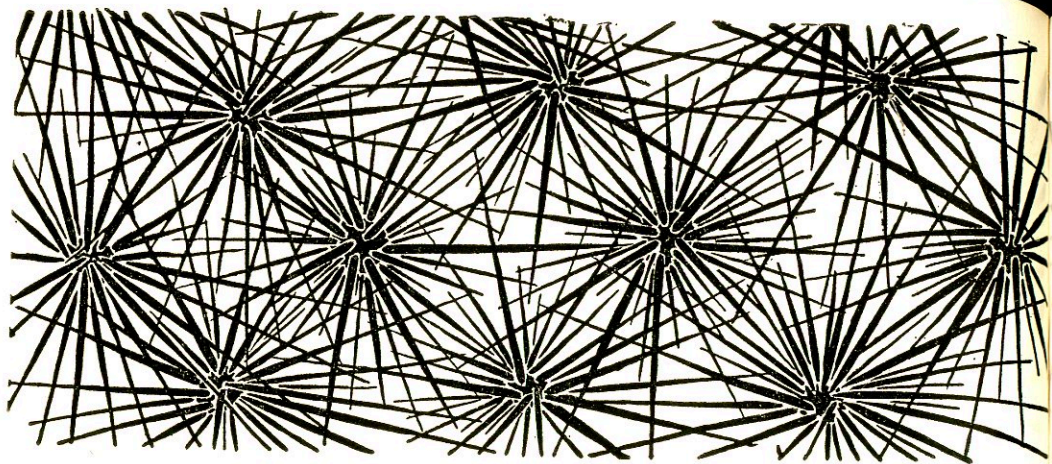
I would have prowled in gray ghost-towns, I would have known some lively ghosts,

I would have eaten the desert food served by some curious varied hosts,
Fiery chili with Mexicans, spiked with peppers like raw barbed wire,
Nameless dishes with Indian friends, mulligans cooked on a hobo fire,
I would have loved this lonely land, every hidden and secret part.
Heigh-ho-hum! One life, one self, is not enough for this greedy heart.

MIGHT OF SILENCE

Silence of the desert is greater than thunder.
When thunder has spent itself in aerial artillery,
Silence is magnified.





THE HIDDEN SEED

The clamorous insistentcies of life had gnawed like moths and termites
at my mind.

The tapestries of beauty were in shreds. My house of peace was riddled.
I could find

No rest, no quiet place within my heart to build repose, to weave my
robes of rest.

The searching winds of fear unhindered blew and stirred confusion in
my naked breast.

Where should I go? The sea? Its moody tides, its changing restive
waves, its vast unease

Would stir an answering violence within. Another time I might have
need of these.

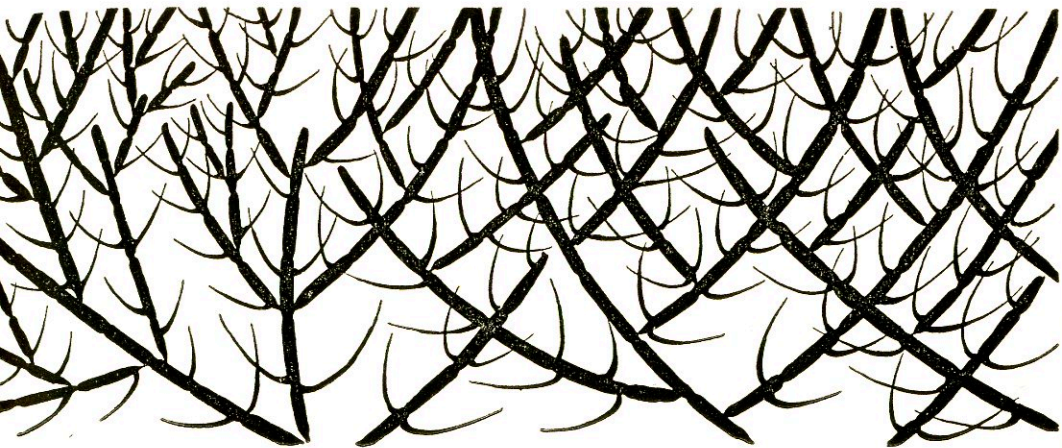
Where? To the mountains? No. The snow-capped peaks would offer
challenge to a wearied heart

As yet unready for the starry climb. What sanctuary waited, set apart
From turmoil of the jet-propulsioned age that roared about confusion-
deafened ears?

The desert? Yes. Perhaps I might find there the anodyne for ache of
rancid tears

That burned behind my eyes, too salt to shed, too long restrained. The
desert winds might dry

The stagnant pools of bitter futile grief. The distances might mute the
frantic cry



That tore the tissues of my throat like claws. Perhaps the bright mirage,
that witching wraith,
Might veil the dark regrets that hovered near masking the guiding light
of my sought faith.

I journeyed to the desert in my need. A while the lethargy of numbing
pain.

Dulled the uneasy nerves, stifled the cry. This was not rest, the surcease
sought in vain.

Subtly the desert drums of silence beat a soft monotony against my
heart,

Lulling, persuasive, rhythmic as a dance until my sluggish pulses felt
the start

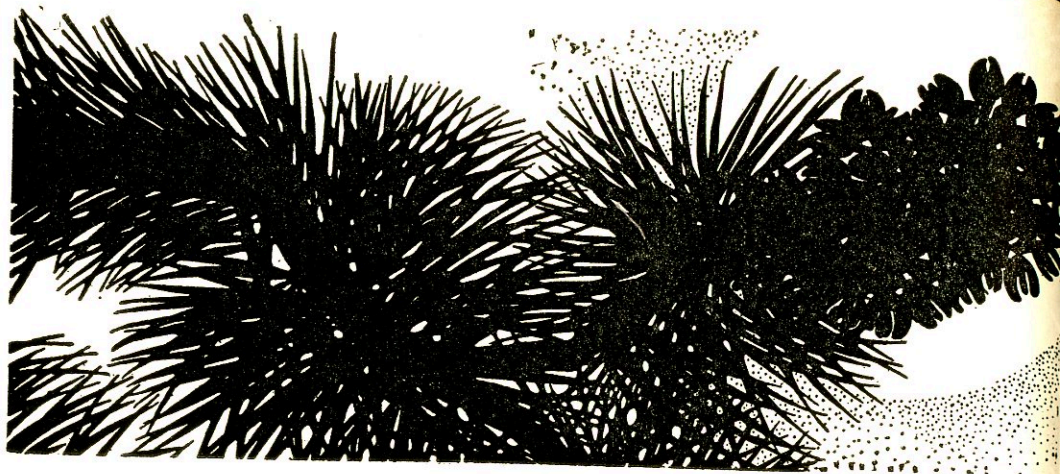
Of freshened blood throughout the deadened veins. The distances, un-
cluttered, vast and blue,

Drained all the toxins like a cosmic sponge. My eyes looked out upon
the world with new

Delight. I saw the aged Joshua trees lift supplicating arms into the sky,
And not in vain, for ivory prayers of bloom opened in ecstasy, even as I
Could feel the buds of hope begin to swell, forming and shaping into
future bloom.

My sanctuary was no four-walled cell. It grew into a vast and spacious
room

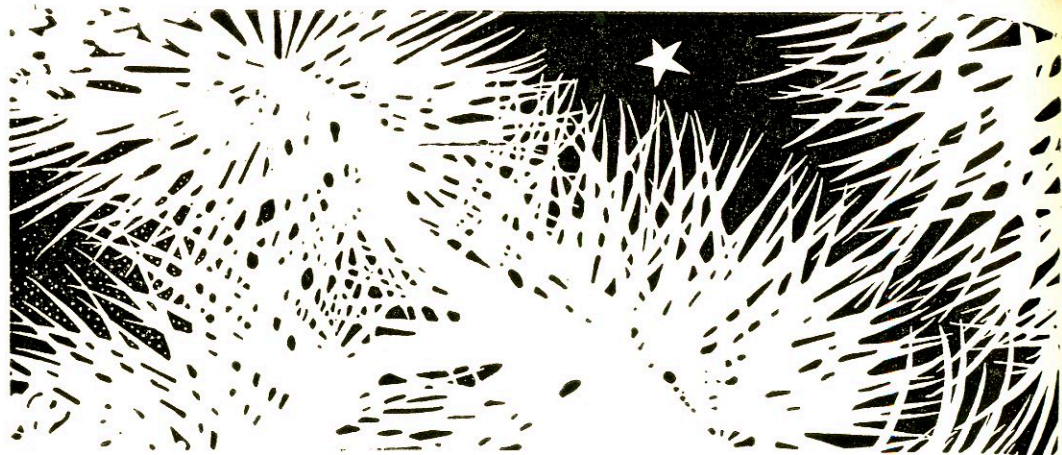
Muralled with mountains, blue and amethyst, ceilinged with turquoise
studded with white stars.



No door, no key to lock myself within. The virile wind blew down the
rigid bars
That I had placed between the world and me. I knew the freedom of the
realm of God.
I saw frail flowers have their transient hour when winter rains dissolved
the sun-baked clod.
I learned the patience of the desert's time where eons are but minutes
lost in space.
I saw the latent beauty of the heart that throbbed undaunted in that
desolate place.
I saw the slow persistent Sculptor's hand shaping resistant rock to
beauty's forms
Using the wind and sand, the heat and chill, the constant chisels of the
frost and storms.
I drank the healing wine of sunny hours and sipped the silver liqueur
of the moon.
I read the sky's bright starry heiroglyphs and heard the orchestra that
threads a tune
With subtle overtones through desert years, a rhapsody of silence with
the gongs
Of centuries to mark the rhythmed beat. I heard the fragile gossamer of
songs
That came from feathered throats of shy small birds articulate with
gratitude for life.
I learned to sing my own song once again, an eager song that welcomed
climb and strife

Don Disbury





To test the strength renewed, the armored faith. I heard the crusted
granite barriers burst
To let artesian springs of water flow, not tears but healing waters for
my thirst.

The desert waits as it has waited long, aloof, inviolate and oldly wise,
Offering nothing but withholding naught. The door is open for the pil-
grim's eyes
To looked within and find what he may find of healing, rich abundance,
empty air,
Taking only what he brings . . . the seed . . . to blossom or to wither
in despair.

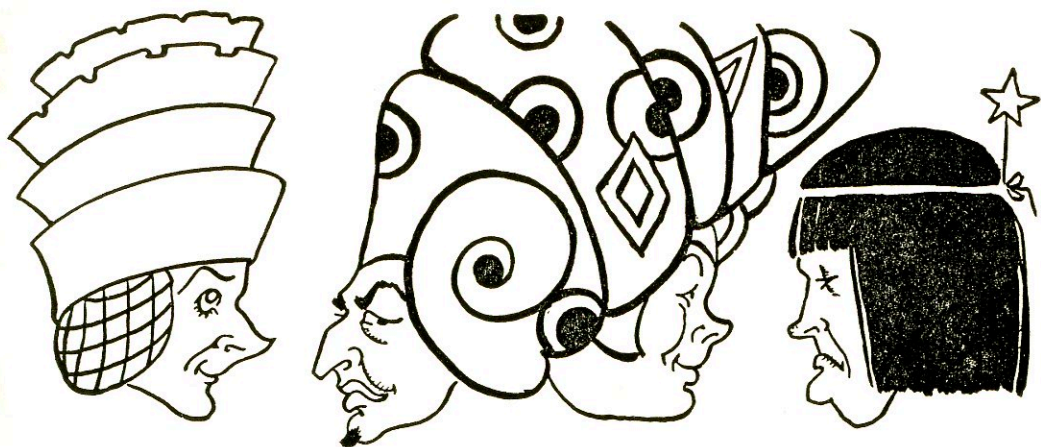
GUARDS

The palm trees stand so tall and straight
Like guards before a ducal gate
With crested heads so high and proud
Above the passing hurried crowd.
Unless you looked you would not know . . .
They guard a humble bungalow.

WEB OF COMMERCE

Signal Hill by moonlight

Machine-age spider spins a monstrous metal web
Across a plastic sky to snare a neon moon.



CULTISTS

If you want excitement, money and fame
 Think up a whimsical whamsical name,
 Get a white nightie and start a new cult,
THE MYSTIFIED SISTERS OF ULTIMATE ULT,
THE BOISTEROUS BROTHERS OF BIBULOUS BOO,
THE CHILDREN OF CHILDREN OF CHILDREN OF MOO,

Get a bright turban and give it a wrap-around,
 Christen your cult and start slinging the scrap around.
 Tinkle a tambourine, chant to a zither,
 "Where is the Whence and Which is the Whither?"

Get Mrs. Rearbumper all of a dither,
 Burn tons of incense, make genuflections,
 Find lots of well-to-do social connections,
 Woo wealthy widows and bored blonde divorcees,
 Sell them a batch of Deep Breathing Courses.

Call your cult Yami or Hoodoo or Koodoo,
 "You do as I do . . . I'll see that you do."

Don't be inhibited, dish out the ecstasy,
 Such mystical mush is vicarious sextasy
 For frustrated females of various genders
 Who use it in place of good old-fashioned benders.

If you don't know the patter. Don't worry . . . just fake it.
 It's a wonderful graft if your stomach can take it.

So here's to the Cultists. I shouldn't make fun of them.
 In one way or another we're each of us one of them.



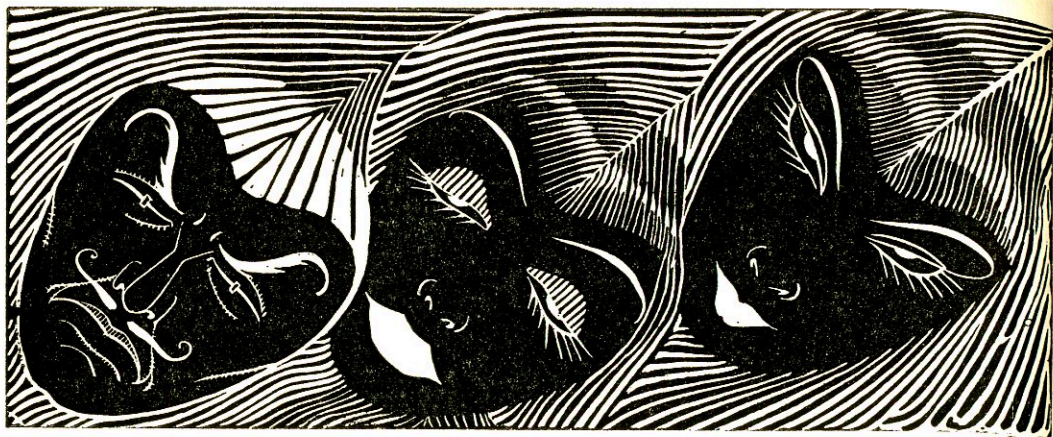




CITY PARK

This is a place of Autumn in a summer land,
Where people, old and middle-old, the sere and gray
Women and men with withering November hearts
Blown by a hundred vagrant winds, foregather here.
July fragrance of magnolias' ivory cups
Blends with their dry and dusty musk of drifted leaves
Far from their native boughs. The lure of yesterdays
Shimmers like a bright mirage before their year-dimmed eyes.
A country woman's brown worn hands spill crumbs of bread
For urchin-pigeons. In her wistful heart they are
Wyandottes, Buff Cochins, Plymouth Rocks, White Leghorns,
Cackling proud announcement of the new-laid eggs.
A gray-haired man with lost bewildered hound-dog gaze
Searches each passing face for some familiar sign,
A curve of hat or quirk of smile to say to him,
"Iowa . . . Texas . . . Arkansas . . . a hometown friend."
The aimless talk is always of the good old days,
Those hoarded days gilded with memory's specious gold.
A few folks, rich with juices like September peaches,
Turn to the warming sun with welcome gratefulness,
Ripening and mellowing to meet the Harvest Day.
The sweetness of acacia and white jasmine's bloom
Can not dispel the scent of Indian Summer haze
Which hangs like sad and blue nostalgic gossamer,
Nor exorcise the fear of winter's hovering threat
In Autumn hearts that stilly wait in summer's land,





THE FACELESS ONE

I am Hollywood. The Movies. The Faceless One with ten thousand faces.

I am all Ages, all Bloods, all Sexes . . . I am the Three Graces.

"Three!" shrieks Glockbauer, the Producer. "Make it Thirty!"

I am all Beauty . . . Venus, Eve, Ishtar, Kwanyin and Dirty Gertie.

I am the Great Hermaphrodite . . . Male, Female and Neuter.

I am Lover and Beloved, Romeo and Juliet, The Sought and the Suitor.

My Silver-Screen Mirror reflects the Spirit, the Flesh and the Devil.

I am Universal Water, seeking . . . and finding . . . *your* level.

I am the Tempting Mouth, the Luscious Curve, the Eloquent Eyebrow.

I speak all tongues, all idioms, the Lowbrow, Nobrow and Highbrow.

I am the Emotional Automat . . . for your dollar, dime or nickel

I dish out Caviar, Gefultefish, Hamburger . . . with or without pickle.

I am Virtue in Rags, Sin in Sequins, Love in a Bustle,

Garbo, Gable, Grable, Bergman, Crawford . . . and Jane Russell.

(change the names with the years . . . the types are eternal.)

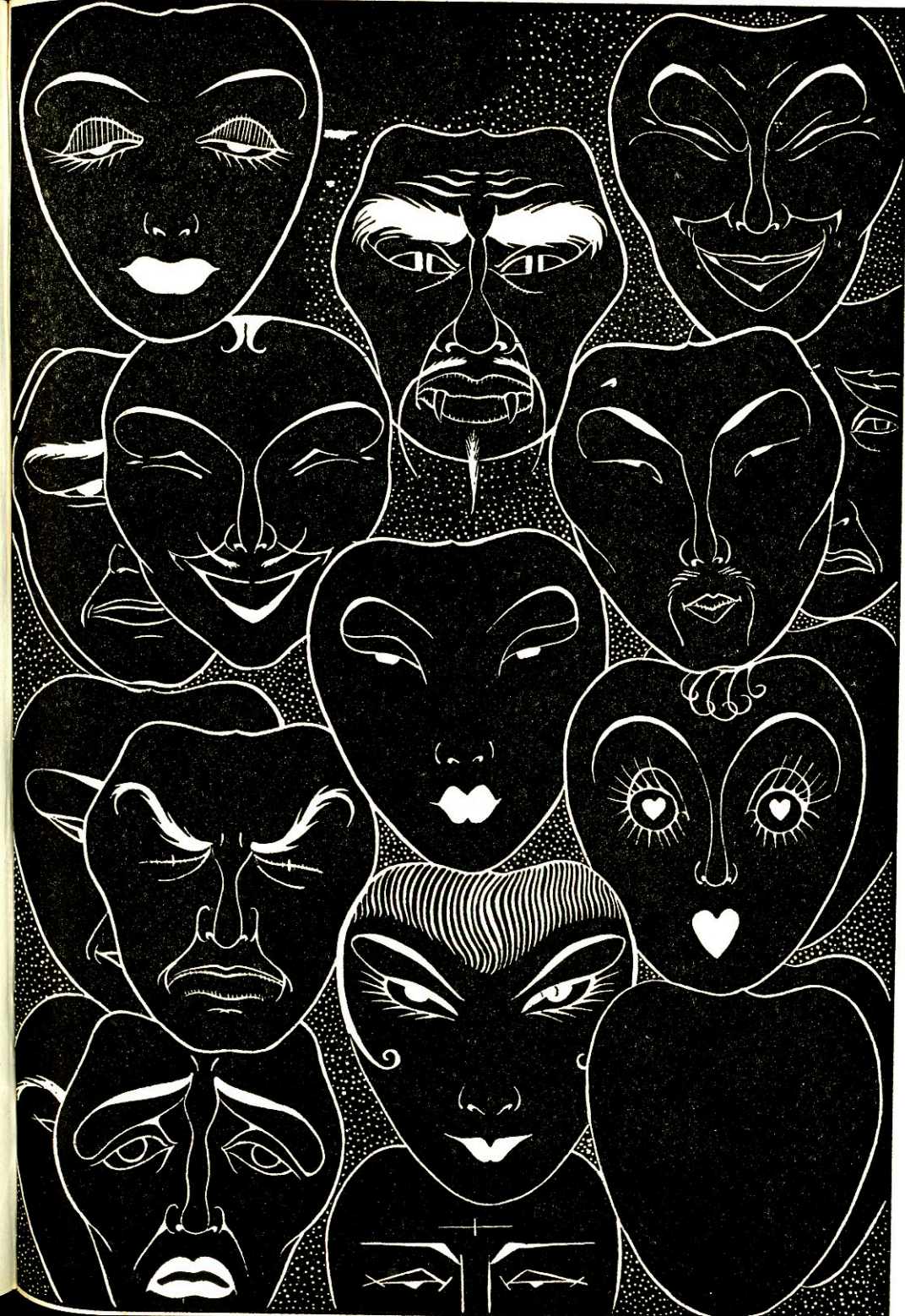
I am What-You-See-In-Me . . . Love, Sacred, Profane or Infernal.

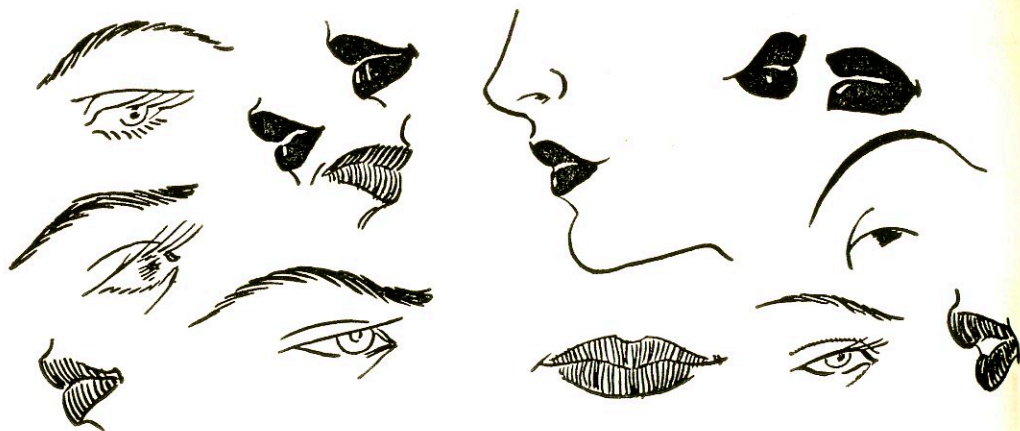
I am Boy-Meets-Girl, Fata Morgana, Horatio Alger, the Happy Ending.

I am Symbol of Fur-Lined Bathtubs and Prodigal Spending.

I am Prodigal Son, the Fatted Calf, The Golden Calf, Cain and Abel.

Speaking of Calves, I'm more Leg Conscious than a Centipede or a Table.





I am Music of the Spheres, Ave Maria and the Siren's Song.
I am the Song of Bernadette . . . and She Done Him Wrong.
I am Heloise and Abelard, Frankie and Johnnie, Bill and Min,
Broken Blossoms, Birth of a Nation, What Price Glory and Elinor
Glynn.

I am Over The Hill To The Poorhouse and Brewster's Millions,
I am Low-down Hoe-downs, Polkas, Kootches and Court Cotillions,
I am Vicarious Passion for Dreamers and Frustrated Females.
I am Yum-Yum, Pin-Up Girl, Pictured Itch for Sex-Hungry He-males.
I am News Reel, Time Marching On, The Candid and Candied Camera.
I am Life in the Raw, the Great Strip Tease, The Revealer and the
Glamourer.

I think in Capital Letters, Superlatives, Super-Colossals,
I am Mother of Novelties and Reviver of Joe Miller's Fossils.
I am the Great Weep, Libido, The Belly Laugh, Snicker and Chuckle.
I am the Tragic Buffoon . . . the ghost of Fatty Arbuckle.
The Chaplin-Who-Was, Mary Pickford's Curls, Shirley Temple's Dim-
ples,

Moron's Delight, Substitute for Thought, an Adolescent's Pimples.

I am a Cowboy who doesn't know which end of a Horse is
Which end of a Horse. I am an Orgy in Five Reels and Courses.
I am the Grand Chameleon, mimicking Life in Technicolor.
Merton of the Movies, Topsy and Eva, Uncle Tom, Lillith and Maud
Muller.

I am Gloria Glamour, Harry Chest, Maurice Musclebound, Cutie Cu-
ticle.

I am the Great Cathartic . . . Emotional, not Pharmaceutical.



I can be Joan the Woman, Mary the Mother, the Repentant Magdalene,
The Drab, the Indestructible Virgin, Empress, Burlesque Queen,
I am the Vociferous Duck, Krazy Kat, a Slap-Happy Mouse,
I am What Makes Sammy Run, A Genius, a Hero, . . . a Louse.
I am the Leer, the Burning Glance, the Lips A-Tremble With Passion.
The Gay Nineties, Gone With the Wind . . . and the Last Screech of
Fashion.

I am a Kick in the Pants, Pie in the Face, Prat Fall, the Amplified Belch.
I speak Chinese, Esquimo, English, American, Brooklynese, Okie and
Welch.

My Featureless Face wears the Grief of Niobe, the Mask of Medusa.
I am the Goal for Youth from the Ultimate Pole to Azusa.
I am the Horror of Dracula, Sweat of Jean Valjean, Blood of a Martyr,
Zaza, Billy the Kid, Little Lord Fauntleroy, Pollyanna, A Tartar.
Aladdin's Lamp, The Magic Carpet, the Wishing Ring, the Maze of
Mystery.

I record Today, Predict Tomorrow and rewrite the Script of History.
I am Prince Charming, Hamlet as John Barrymore, I am Norma Shearer.
I am What-The-Public-Wants, I am Yourselves, seen in your Docile
Mirror.

I am Truth, Hokum, Trash, Kindly Light. I am What-You-Wish-Me.
Intellectuals Scorn Me, People Adore Me, Columnists Dish Me.
I wear the Masks that You Fashion. Love Me. Damn Me. Flout Me.
I am Hollywood . . . Fabulous Follywood. What would you do with-
out me?



WITHIN THESE BORDERS

God knows I am a wander-footed soul
Greedy of sensuous delight. The whole
Wide world would be too puny-small to hold
Satiety for me. I would unfold
The map of earth and then the chart of Heaven
Including Hell, and ask the gods for seven
Lives to live . . . then ask for seven more
That I might use to prowl, snoop and explore
Whatever lands the sun and moon shine on,
The heights, the depths, the widths and hither-yon.

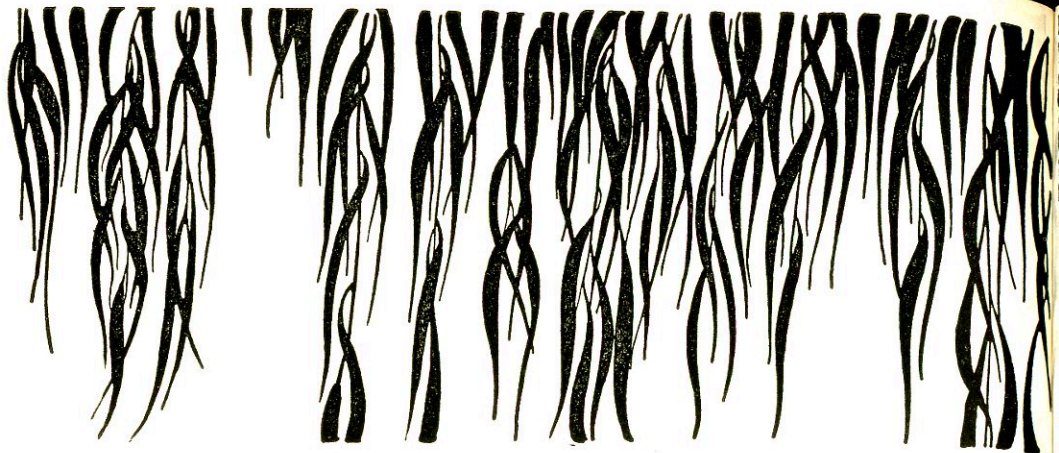
But I would not protest *too* much if Fate
Should say, "You must not ever leave this State
Of California til the time you go
On venturings above . . . perhaps below."

But I would drive a bargain, sealed and signed,

Before I bade my heart to be resigned
To limits of its vagabonding way.
I'd look Fate in the eye and firmly say,
"I will accept your hampering decree
Provided I am wind-and-eagle free
To range at will, to rove with whim, to seek
The smallest brook, the darkest cave, the whitest peak,
For I would call each mountain by its name
And know its moods, no dawn nor dusk the same.
I'd worship Shasta, goddess chaste and white,
Watching her change her robes of jewel-light,

Rose-opal in the dawn or veiled in mist
Of iridescent tints, with amethyst
For moods of sorrow purple-drenched and winey,
Or see her bare her flesh like fabled Phryne,
White breasts and thighs, beauty without flaw
That men might know a moment of pure awe.
And I would listen while the god-heads speak
Shouting with voice of silence, peak to peak,
Telling of ancient days in raffish youth.
Perhaps in silence I might hear the gongs of Truth.

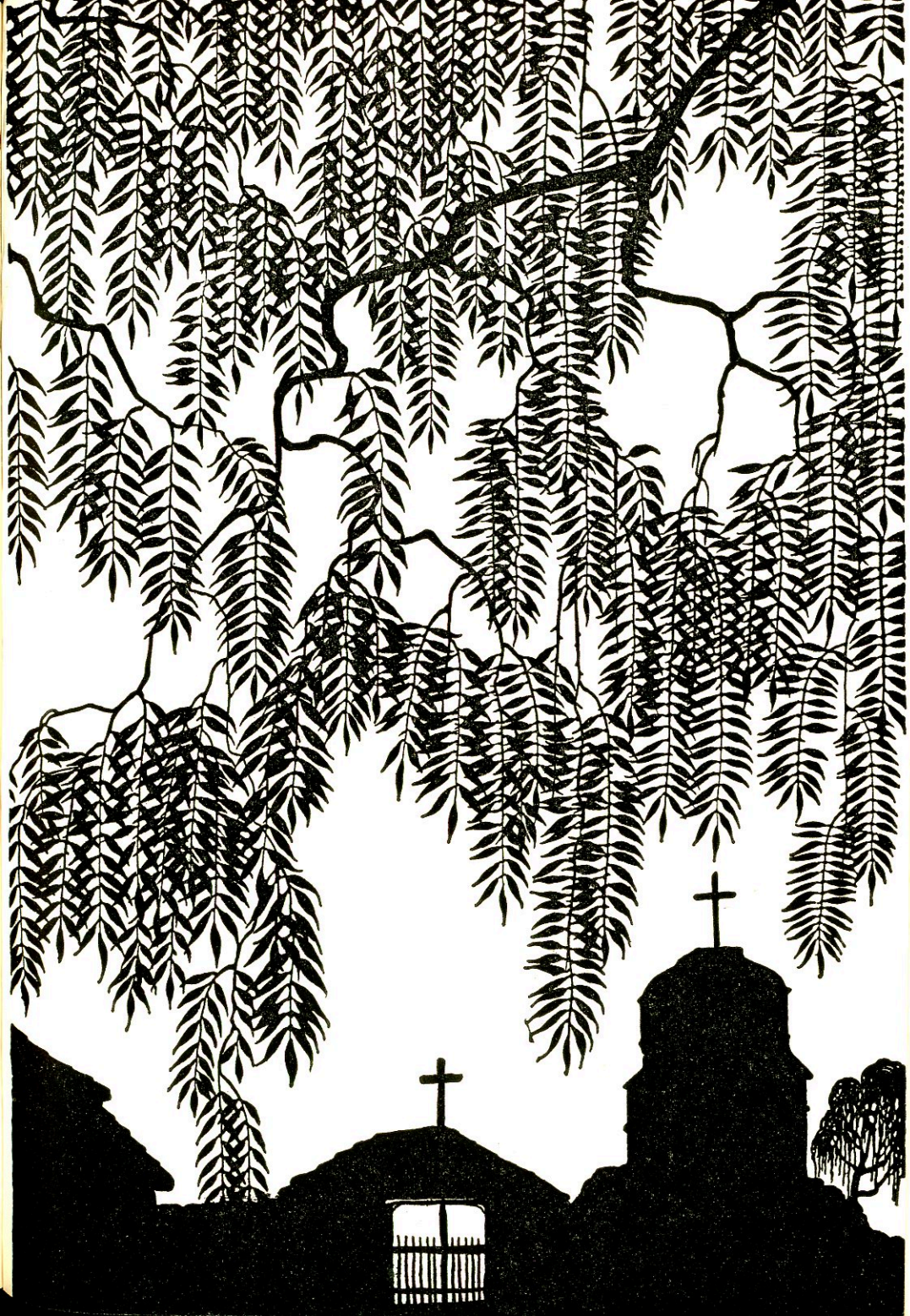
And I would know the mountain-meadows' calm
Soothing my nerves and mind with fragrant balm
Of balsam incense, cedar smoke and pine,
Learning a little of the Plan, vast and divine,
Which scoops a valley with a glacier's plow
And shapes a wren's nest on a tree's green bough,
That places in a seed, so needle-small
That I can scarcely see the seed at all,
A perfect plan of growth, detailed, complete
For great Sequoia trees that proudly meet
The passing clouds in forest camaraderie
And with the same vast wisdom plans a bee
Or gnat with shining fragile perfect wings,
Or gives a bird the music that it sings.
And I would read the geologic book
Whose pages open on each cliff and nook,
Telling of travail of the cosmic birth
That brought such splendid beauty to our earth.
The North, the South, the Desert-East, the Ocean-West
Until the day when roving feet find rest,
(the feet will rest perhaps because they must
But, oh, the spirit will make restless dust!)

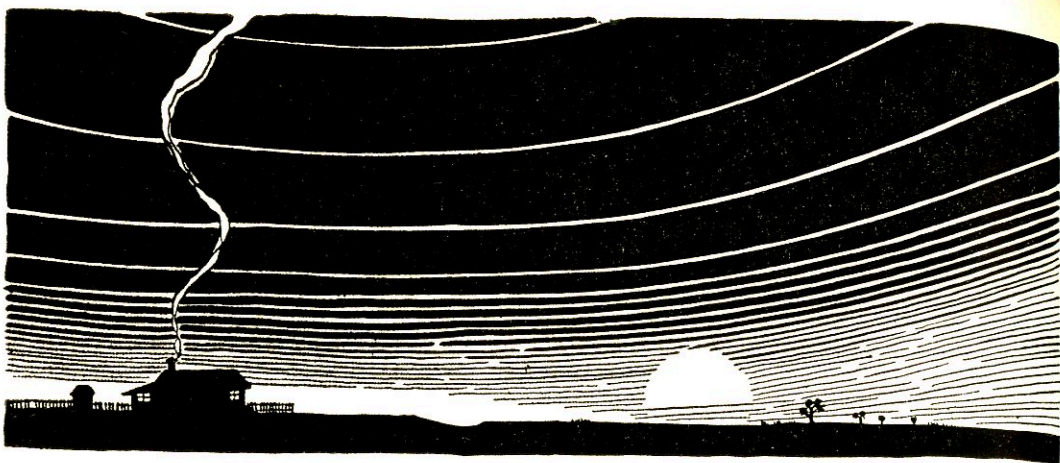


KINDLY VEIL

How tenderly the pepper leaf-lace strains
The crusted sweat, the tears and bloody stains
Of vanished years. The phantom memory floats
About the ruined mission like the notes
Of ancient bells still vibrant on the wind.
Time's long diluting days and nights have thinned
The anguished prayers to zephyr-sighs so dim
That they are like the echoes of a hymn
Breathing at twilight through a poet's dream.
If brown adobe earth could voice the scream
Of terror or the groan of laboring flesh,
What tales of stricken hopes would weave a mesh
For History's searching fingers to unwind.
Perhaps Time's slow eraser is but kind
In blurring outlines to a softer tone
Of pastel romance, muting the dull moan,
Fading the stark colors with an artist's tricks
And haloing the shadow of the crucifix.

Gently the pepper leaf-lace veils the space,
Hiding the wrinkles on the aged sorrowing face.





DEAR NEIGHBOR

"Dear Neighbor," said the letter, "please forgive
This scribble from a stranger. Where I live
Is such a tiny town that current maps
Ignore its name, and yet, who knows . . . perhaps
In vagabonding up and down our State
You might have passed, quite unaware that Fate
Had given you a loyal friend, unknown,
In this drab desert town. A friendship grown
With years since our first friendly meeting
When your voice came to me in cheerful greeting,
'Aloha, Friend.' Since then you've been my neighbor
With back-fence chats that lightened household labor.

My story? I came here not seeking wealth
But that more precious gold, sunshine and health.
I found the gold . . . the price was loneliness,
Such loneliness that often, I confess,
I almost wished that I had died before
I left my Eastern hometown. From my door
I looked on space, so empty, vast and bare
That there were days when I would scarcely dare
To peer outside for fear I'd scream and run,
And I was glad when each long day was done.
A present came one Christmas . . . such a gift.

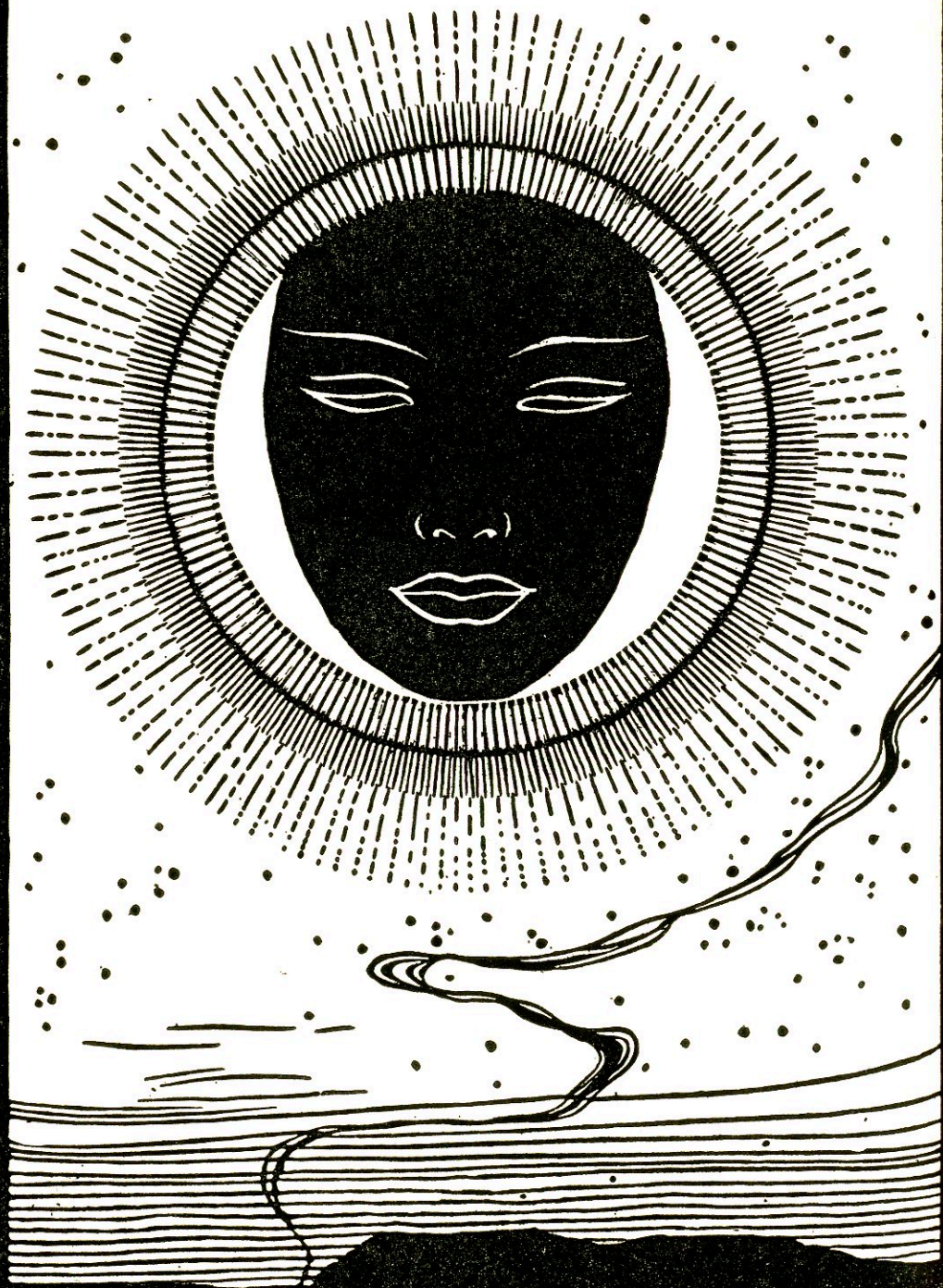
A radio! A magic box to lift
My spirit on swift wings in eager flight
To distant places of the day or night.
The greatest voices came to sing for me.
I heard a weary king make wistful plea
For his man's right to love. That fearful bomb
That shook the world, disturbed the endless calm
Of my long desert days. I had to smile
When household experts told the latest style
For serving caviare and artichokes.
I chuckled with comedians' gay jokes.
You came into this room across the miles
And told of far enchanted South Sea isles.
I know you all so well, and I am glad
When you are glad; I weep when you are sad.
Your voices are familiar to my ear
As my own voice . . . which I so seldom hear.
And so, you understand just why I wrote
To say, 'Dear Neighbor, thank you.' in my note."

REDWOOD FOREST

Here is a secret richness,
A hoard of hidden wonder.
Here is muted music
Vibrant in the air.
Here is mighty silence
Articulate as thunder,
Here is living stillness
Eloquent as prayer.
Star-dust in the tree tops,
Star-dew on the sod.
Here my heart stands taller
To talk with God.

FOOD RIOTS

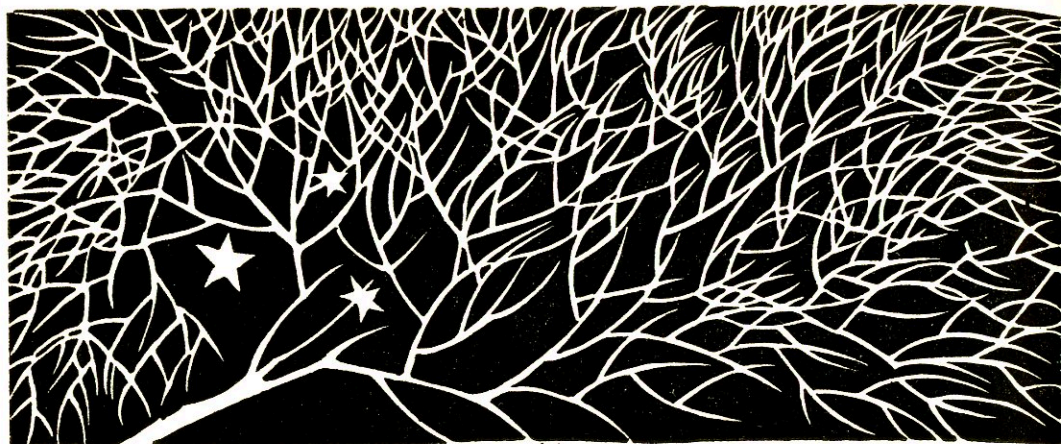
Mumpy little chipmunks, their cheeks bulged with peanuts,
Squabble with the bluejays to grab the most free nuts.





OBSIDIAN MASK

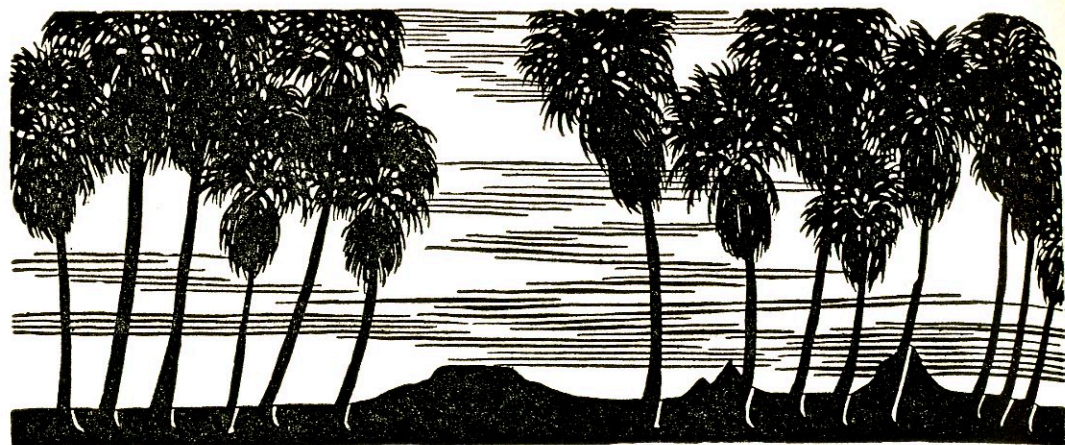
I am Desert. I am not cruel
As you say of me,
Nor am I kind,
This is the way of me
You will find;
I am a faceted jewel
Moulded in ancient fires.
I am not cruel.
In my hard indifferent mirrors
I can reflect
Only your desires,
Your secret terrors,
That which you cravenly expect.
You see your own face and call it mine . . .
I show you the true man.
I am not divine,
Nor am I human.
Nor am I lonely,
I am myself, myself only,
I am less than soul, more than mind,
I am not cruel,
I am not kind.
Not good . . . not bad.
If you go mad
You bring your own madness.



If you are sad
You see your own sadness.
I do not speak.
In my silence you will hear
Only the echo of your voice,
That which you fear.
I have no choice.
You hear the aloneness that you seek,
Unknowing that you seek it.
I echo your prayer, your curse, your crying,
I do not speak it.
I neither pity nor mock your dying.
You bring the ghosts you flee from.
You hear the gnawing of the sorrow
You pray to be free from.
You must learn,
Only that which you have spoken
In syllable, rent and broken,
Will return.
I can not give nor can you borrow
Surcease from me, nor anodyne.
They are not mine.
I can neither grieve nor yet rejoice.
I have no choice.
I am not cruel . . . I do not kill.
Would I take cat-pleasure



In petty torture, I who know the measure
Of virile seas flooding my drouth?
The salt kisses still scorch my mouth.
I have had my fill
Of primal ecstasy, of searching blight.
I am content. Let my flint heart burn
Until my lover-sea's return,
Surging and potent, bringing the fresh
Passion of kisses to my dry remembering flesh,
Could I then delight
In men's small agonies? I do not kill.
Obsidian are my rules
Which wise men learn. Only the fools
Kill themselves against my barren breast.
I neither welcome nor scorn you,
But I warn you,
I do not jest.
My cactus lift barbed hands in mute protest.
Each yucca stands on guard with bayonets
Lest man forgets.
If you bring thirst
Where there is no water
Shall I be cursed?
I am the sun's sterile daughter.
Briefly man thinks he conquers, rapes me,
Chain me with roads and cities.



I am above tears and futile pities.
I am above vengeance, yet, none escapes me.
Ask ghosts of Rhyolite, ask Babylon,
Sands that scorpions and lizards scabble on.
I am not cruel as you say of me
Yet no man may have his way of me.
I am not god,
I am not fate,
I am myself,
Inviolat.

CALIFORNIA . . . OPEN COUNTRY

Open houses . . . open doors,
Open hearts and open pores,
Open minds . . . for cults and fads,
Open arms for lusty lads,
Open car to open market
(but find an open space to park it),
Open roads for tourists coming,
Still some rustic open plumbing,
Open hands . . . to welcome suckers,
Open-all-night joints for truckers,
Movies in the open air
(good for furtive love-affair)
Miles of empty open spaces
And miles of empty open faces.

THE UBIQUITOUS DANDELION

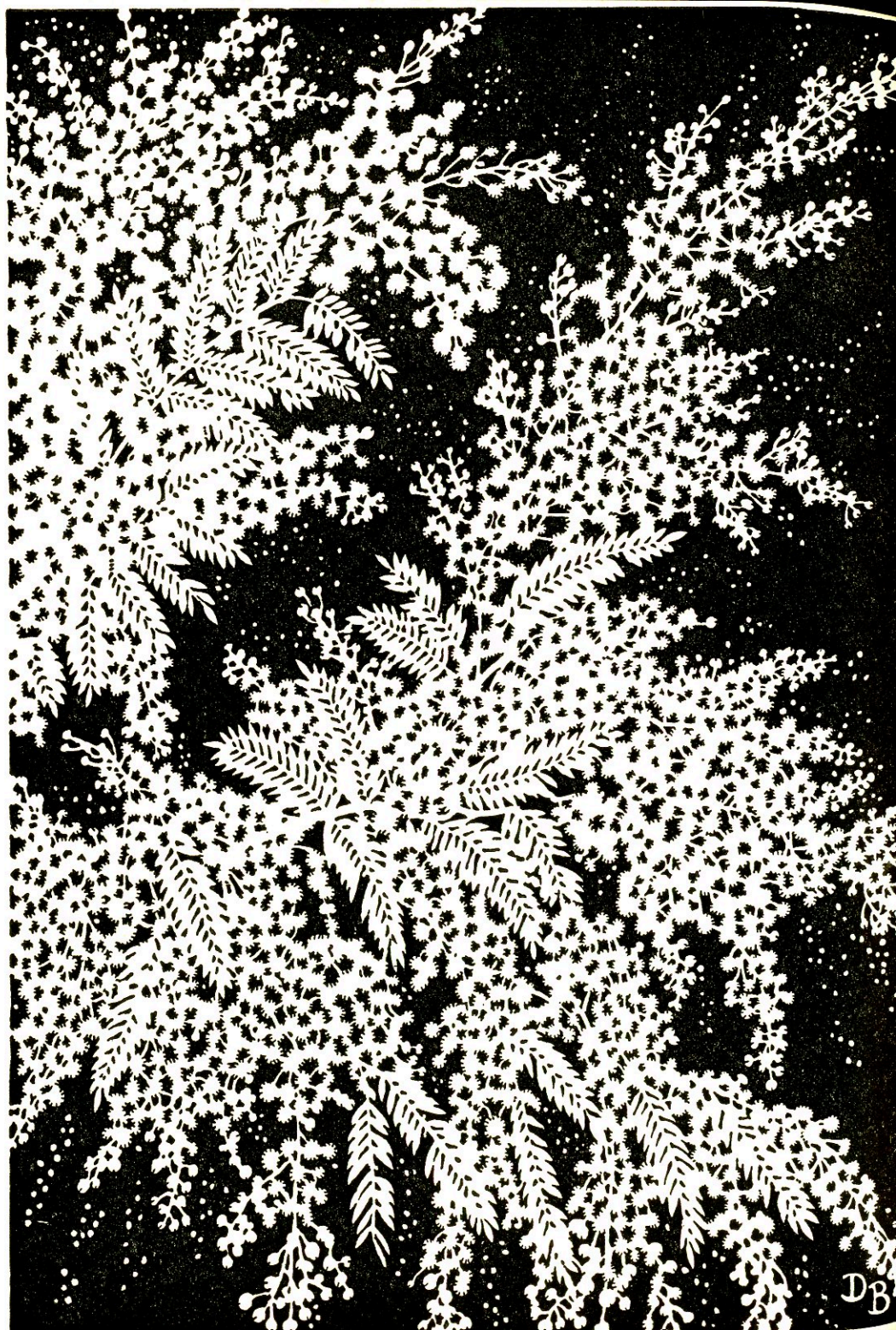
If dandelions were hard to raise
The Garden Clubs would chant their praise.
But since we need not fertilize 'em
It's human nature to despise 'em.
So rancor swells the breasts (or chests)
Of gardeners who mutter "Pests."
 When strolling in the dewy dawn
 I love to see 'em on the lawn,
 But then, it's not my lawn, and so,
 I should worry where they grow.

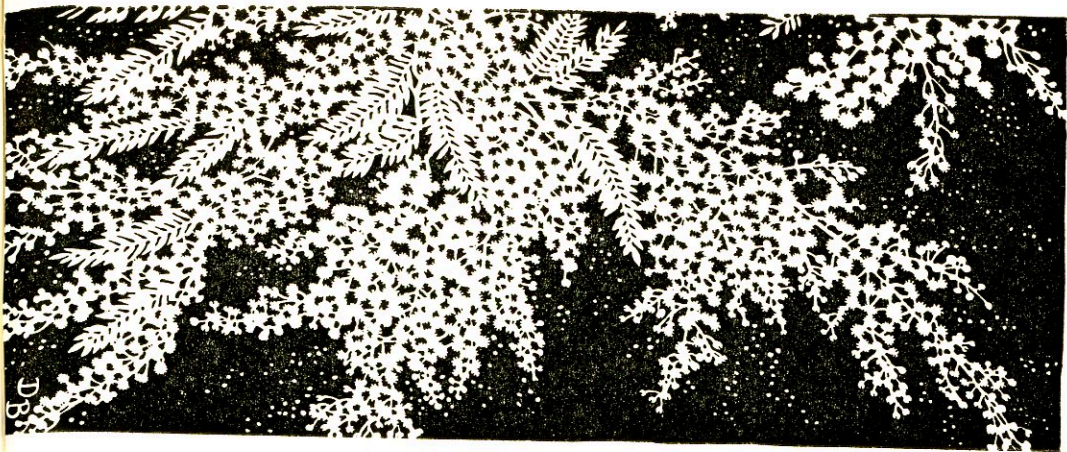
SUCH IS GLORY

They called him "Avenging Angel, The Flaming Sword that Flies,"
Now he writes vapor slogans,
 "Gulp Grog," or "Grub at Grogan's"
On California skies,
For the crowd's indifferent eyes.

DIET RULE TO END ALL DIET RULES

What you don't stuff in your face
Won't add pounds some other place.
What your appetite indulges
Changes curves to bulky bulges.



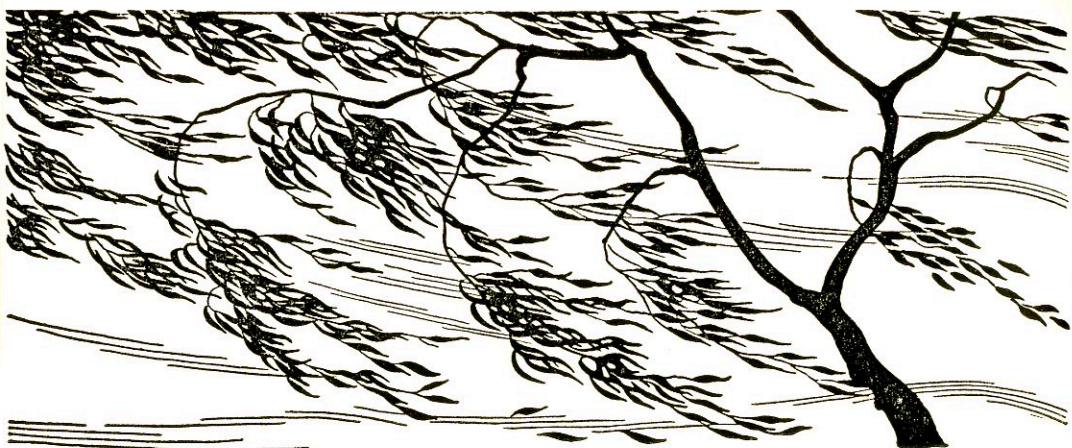


BUBBLE BATH

California is a woman,
At least so I assume,
Because she loves to scent her flesh
With soft perfume.
When acacia is in flower
Watch and you'll behold . . .
The lady takes her bubble-bath
In pollen-gold.

UNWRITTEN LAW

In Carmel-by-the-Sea
It is an unwritten law that no one
Shall have less than one
Dog.
I can't figure out
Whether the dogs
Grow to resemble the owners
Or vice-versa
But there are
Some remarkable resemblances . . .
Sometimes you can't tell
Which is which
Until one of them
Barks.



SUNSET WINES

The sunset's azure cloth is richly stained
With ardent wines as though the day-gods drained
The casks of Life, then lifting goblets high
Shattered their brimming goblets on the sky,
A great defiant gesture of farewell,
A pagan rite so splendid that its spell
Enchants the watchers who, each in his way,
Shares the libation to departing day,
Drinking through mortal eyes the god-wine spilled
And goes his way with thirsting heart fulfilled.

The happy watchers choose from sunset wines
Bright Burgundies distilled from magic vines;
They see confetti cloudlets through a rift
Of darker clouds like restless flakes that drift
In Goldenwasser and they taste this Midas gold,
Or sip the bright champagnes of light that hold
Bubbles of laughter, froths of mirth that float,
Sufficient wine to please the shallow throat.
Drunken with color, warm with joy they go
Leaving the sad dark dregs of afterglow.

The lonely ones who watch the sea at dusk
Choose the harsh flavor of the briny musk

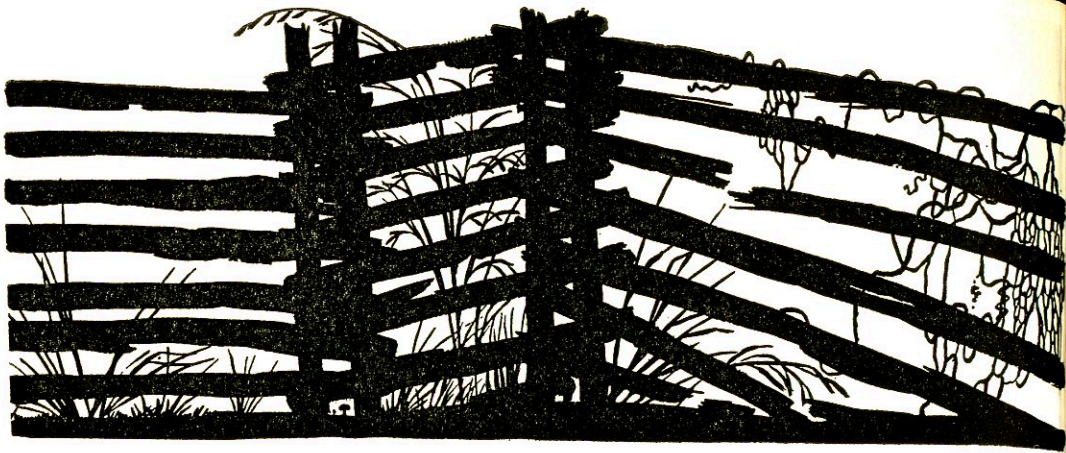
Brewed of long shadows, chilled in wind and mist.
They know, these hearts of drought that sorrow kissed
How this long somber hour of dusk discloses
The sweetness of the Wine of Bitter Roses.
They seek the subtler flame, the hidden savor.
With masochistic joy they taste the flavor
Of secret tears, the saline hint of blood.
The lotus flower rooted in the mud
Yields a liqueur they crave, an anodyne
For aftermath of too much love, a wine
Fragrant with sad nostalgia's dark bouquet.
For them the absinthe rather than tokay.
Elusive flavors teasing to the tongue
With haunting aftertaste like songs once sung
And half-forgotten, haunting the sick heart.
They are secret drinkers, drawn apart.
They know that thirst deep-smouldering in the mind
Is heart-blood of the wine. They seek to find,
Like the mystic suppliant who begs
For crusts . . . realities among the dregs.

CARMELODY

Sudden moods of sorrow come
And drift away
Like driven clouds, soft minor chords
Threading the major melody of day.

SKETCH

The ground beneath the eucalyptus trees
Is like a battlefield
Strewn with rusty scimitars
Of a defeated army.



STILL LIFE, PIONEER KITCHEN

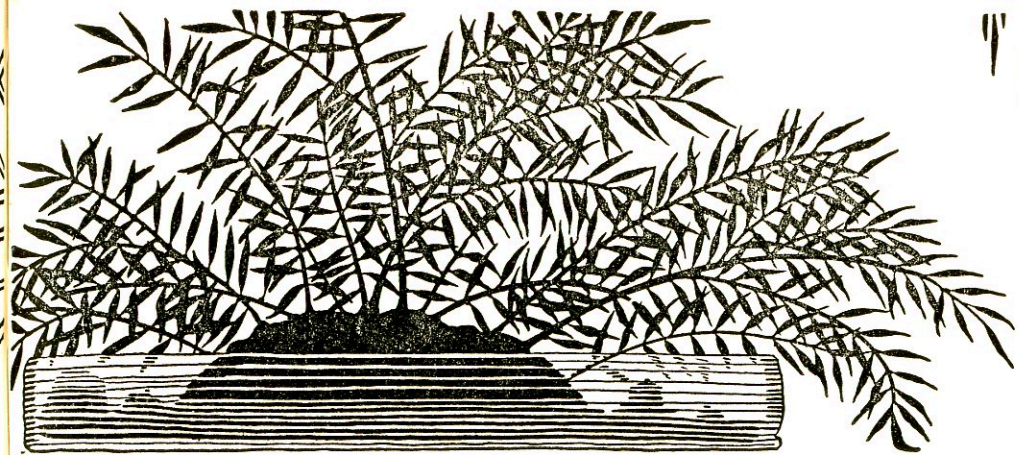
Under guidance of friends I was making a casual inspection
Of records and relics from Pioneer Days, a collection
Of implements, furniture, garments and portraits of faces
Dust this long time. In museum style the glass cases
Set them aside, embalmed them, removed them from fingering
Of souvenir hunters. These symbols of life held a lingering
Wistfulness, something nostalgic, a ghostly awareness
Like a gossamer vibrancy warming the walls' sterile bareness.
Here were portraits of plainsmen, great ladies and statesmen,
People once living and vital, those chosen as Fate's men
For shaping the future, for breeding the new generation.
On their faces we saw the blue-prints for building our nation.
They had served. They had passed. We saluted . . . and strolled to new
viewing,
Thoughtful of Time and its sequence of death and renewing.

We came to an alcove and read the words, "Pioneer Kitchen,"
Authentic in every detail, designed to enrichen
The memory with things half-forgotten yet tenderly treasured
By all who had lived in those days and remembered the pleased
Hours of slower-paced living when life had a flavor
Mellow and homely, when time was sufficient to savor
The richness. Here was a kitchen of pioneer living . . .
Walls of old redwood, polished and sorrel-hued, giving





Warmth and graciousness friendly as gestures of greeting;
Curtains of home-woven fabric half-drawn to show fleeting
Glimpses to gardens with colorful old-fashioned flowers;
Kitchen floors spotlessly boasting the housewifely hours
Given in tribute to standards of cleanliness, rated
Next to the godliness prized in those days . . . and how dated!
Here was the kitchen stove, ample and regally gleaming
With nickel and polish to shine in a fire's warm beaming.
The wood-box piled high with good seasoned wood and fat splinters
Of resinous pine for quick fires on crisp mornings of winters.
The oven door hinting of turkeys or bread, golden-crusted,
And dribble-juiced pies or rolls with cinnamon dusted;
Nearby the cookie jar yawned with its wide and capacious
Mouth expectant of goodies. The cupboard shelves, spacious,
Crowded with all of the mysteries, packaged and bottled,
For things culinary. And here was the churn, brownly mottled.
Here was the kettle (one waited to see the steam rising);
Here were the saucepans and skillets for fragrant devising
Of eatables. Here were the herbs and various spices,
The book full of recipes, pencilled with hints and advices
For brewing the time-honoured tonics and syrups of healing.
Here was the dinner bell poised for welcomeful pealing
When barking of dogs made announcement of menfolks returning.
Here was the table, red cloth and the dishes laid, yearning.
For people. Each item, the knives and the forks and the glasses,
The napkin rings, sugar bowl, coffee cups (not demi-tasses),



Waiting for using. The dish towel hung limply for wiping;
The high-chair expectantly patient, sighed for the piping
Of small childish chatter. The room was a wistful reflection
Of *still-life*, or *stilled life*, perhaps, that expects resurrection.

There was a sadness about it, a sadness so aching
That somewhere it seemed there must be the right word for breaking
The rigid enchantment, the spell which held in suspension
This rich busy life, these symbols of wish and intention
To share in the living of people. A word which would quicken
The flame in the stove to warm burning, to perfume and thicken
The air with the fragrance of wood-smoke, to conjure a purring
Of steam from the kettle, a clang from the bell, a bright stirring
Of human activity.

Swiftly a prayer, quickly spoken,
Rose in my heart, "Oh, God, I would rather be broken,
Shattered in using, spent in the giving, fuel for the fire,
Than numbed with dull waiting or rotted by futile desire.
Ravel the fabric of muscle and still the heart's beating,
Wither the flesh, crumble the bone . . . but grant my entreating;
Let me be used to the end of my days to *fulfill* life,
But never a museum piece, Oh, never . . . a still-life.



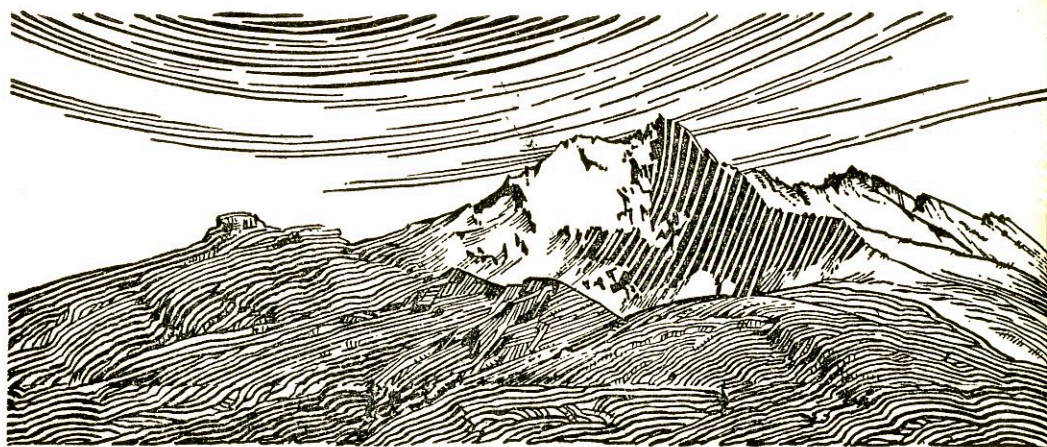


HIGH MOMENT

Once in the life of a man he should challenge a mountain,
Once he should strive to a god-peak, white and defiant,
Best in the turbulent youth of his years when the pliant
Muscles grow ardent for testing, when blood like a fountain
Pulses artesianly, swelling the flesh with desires
Stronger than passion, for conquest. Chill in the morning
The peak is a blade that severs the cord of day's burning
Septic with night's mother-blood, purified by dawn's fires.
Now is the moment the heart must take its account in,
Restraining the first eager stride while the mite and the giant
Measure their lustihoods, girding the heart that aspires
To hazardous victory, tensing to flout the stark warnings.

The start. In the veins there are trumpets and drum-beats that quicken.
Thighs and strong knees thrust in piston-like lifting and bending.
The vision is dizzied by shifting horizons extending
To ominous ramparts looming through storm-clouds that thicken.
The heights bring a weariness, perilous cliffs for the spirit
To scale while the flesh and the sinews turn rebel and laggard.
There are ghosts in the wind-driven mists, phantoms grisly and hag-
gard.

Guarding the shrine of the peak from brash mortals who near it.
Fear creeps like a frost in the blood to make the brain sicken.
Hope lights a countering flame of the heart's brave expending.



Thunders of silence deafen the ear-drums that hear it.
The summit! The triumph! The awe as the last steps are staggered.

Slowly the soul reaches out to horizons expanded.
Arterial walls know an ache as they alter their spacing
For memory's brushes to paint a vast mural, retracing
The might of a man's puny strength, when a challenge commanded.
The descent from the summit is swift, and weary the going.
Exaltation is stilled, the peak diminished with distance.
The body complains as the flesh offers sullen resistance.
The shadows of valleys have quenched the high shrine's vivid glowing.
But the heart of a man who has conquered a god-peak is branded,
An indelible brand, immune to the years' slow erasing,
For the call to the summit will trumpet with endless insistence,
And the heart will reclaim its high moment of glorious knowing.



THE DESERT IS NEVER LONELY

The desert is never lonely,
It is filled with so many things;
It brims with a mighty silence
When the blue horizon sings
In a key too deep for hearing
Except by the muted heart,
When the stars are notes of music
On the sky's vast cosmic chart.

The desert is never lonely
For the small things of the earth
Seeking its stern protection.
The night vibrates with mirth,
Love and death and birthings,
Themes for the least of these
To weave their thousand life-songs
In a hundred different keys.

The desert is filled with waiting,
Patient as time or God
For the years of rich fulfillment
When the sunbaked dune and clod
Will know the kiss of waters
Returned to their primal home
By the magic of man's devising
To mate with the widowed loam.



GAY SPOT

They are so madly gay . . . the brittle laughter
Shatters in crystal prisms, flashes, darts,
Shimmers in blown-glass bubbles, making shriller, dafter
Mirth to mask the scars of wincing hearts.
"Laugh, Fools, Laugh," the mocking strident urging . . .
"Laugh or you'll soon be weeping in your beer.
Bottoms up, Boobs." . . . Hard defiance verging
On stark hysteria to cover nagging fear.
This is a world of half-lights, double-meanings
Frosted with broken glass to rasp the nerves
Until the ear no longer hears the keening
Of sorrow's voice beneath the flippant curves.

They are so sadly gay . . . behind the masking
Smiles and sophistication lurks unceasing pain
Of dark bewilderment, unanswered asking,
The weariness of love foredoomed and vain.
The smoky haze, the dissonance of voices,
The blue veiled lights make real an unreal world
Where for a transient hour the heart rejoices,
Forgetting, or ignoring, the serpent curled
With white fangs, venom-tipped, bared for the slashing
Stroke at the vulnerable vein, the eager lip.
Here is a joy as frothy as the champagne splashing;
Bitter with wormwood is the wine they sip.

"Laugh while illusion wears her sequined glitter.
Tomorrow will know the strip-tease of the day.
Laugh, Fools, Laugh . . . (the dregs are harsh and bitter).
Let us be madly . . . lest we be sadly . . . gay."

$2 + 2 = 4$ (2) sometimes it makes more. D.B.
 $\frac{2}{4}$ 2 $2 + 2 = 4$ Oh No it does not R.F. $2 + 2 = 4$
 $\frac{2}{4}$ two and two can make as many as you want. D.B. Oh yes it does D.B. $\frac{2}{2} = ?$
 $2 + 2 = 4$ $2 + 2 = 4$ No!! R.F. $2 + 2 = 4$
 $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$
 $2 + 2 = 4$ $\frac{2}{4}$ So are you. R.F. It does too. D.B.
 $2 + 2 = 4$ two plus two are (is?) four Oh No R.F. $\frac{2}{2} = 4$
 R.F.

... OR DO THEY?

Yes, yes, My Realist Friend. I know how right you are.
 Two and two make four . . . no more. How smugly tight you are
 Crouched in your bomb-proof, dream-proof cellar
 Counting your two-and-two's. You're the smart feller,
 You're the chap who'll get ahead, the canny schemer.
 I'm the fool, the writer of verse, the impractical dreamer
 When I insist that two-and-two sometimes make more
 Than four.

And sometimes two-and-two make . . . who knows what?
 You knew when you were young . . . but you forgot,
 Counting your two-and-two's and two-and-two's.
 I know you're right, but I refuse
 To measure life and time by your stern yardstick.
 I'll trade that inflexible hard stick
 For a willow wand, a spray of dogwood, or a skein
 Of cobwebs in an attic on a day of rain.

Come, I challenge you to prove your knowledge,
 All those sure wise things you learned in college.
 Let's play our own version of "Information Please."
 Give me the answer to some of these;
 What is April?

April is a time of the year.

April is a time of the heart.

April has thirty days.



April has flirty daze.

April follows March.

April follows human hearts.

It begins on April Fools' day.

It begins with lovers' Happy Fools' day.

It ends at midnight before May First.

It lasts a lifetime, sometimes.

Now, what is a moon?

The moon is a satellite of earth.

It is a satellite of love and sighs and mirth.

It is a mean distance of 238,857 miles away.

It is a mean distance, all right . . .

Just beyond the fingertips of children who cry for it.

Is it the same moon everywhere on earth?

Of course it's the same moon

Everywhere on earth.

That is like saying that a woman is the same woman

In a house-dress or black velvet and pearls,

Or with a fresh permanent and a new hat,

Or in sables,

Or in her lover's arms.

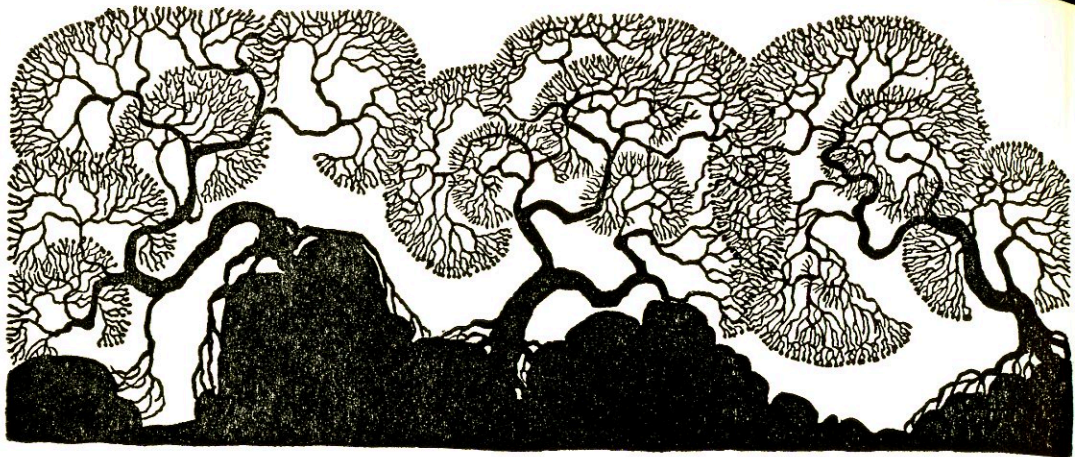
It's the same moon

Everywhere on earth.

There are as many moons

As there are places where it shines.

There are as many moons



As there are eyes to see it.
In Hawaii it is a rose-gold guava
Or a woman's breast.
In the city it is a neon sign
Advertising a new musical comedy.
In the desert it is Time's pale daughter
Watching with indifferent eyes
The birth of men and the death of nations.
It is made of green cheese, of silver, of amber, of cold camphor.
It is a cameo on the dusky throat of night
Or a beauty spot on the cheek of twilight,
It is. . . .

It is the same moon.

It is a dead planet.

Two and two make four

No more.

We're getting nowhere.

That's where we started.

That's where we end.

Hurry back to your dream-proof shelter,
Helter-skelter

With your yardstick and your proof.

If you hear footsteps on the roof

Don't look out because

It might be Santa Claus.

There is one, you know.

NO!

CREAMED CHICKEN

The Creamed-Chicken-and-Green-Pea Circuit,
It's a tough life for those who work it.
It's not the trains . . . it's not the traveling,
It's not the nerve-ends, frayed and raveling,
It's not the lectures (you're paid to babble)
It's the Three-Way-Stretch Girdle-Gobble-Gabble.
It's the Creamed Chicken . . . the Creamed Chicken
That makes the waist-line swell and thicken.
It's the Creamed Chicken in bird's-nest patty
Oozing starches rich and fatty.
It's the pallid cream sauce, wan and gooey,
With weary chicken, tough and chewy.
It tastes like buzzard or dead sea-gull,
It might be a shopworn moulting eagle
Drowned in goop that tastes like mucilage
Flavored with oil from a rusty fusilage.
You can't escape it . . . the Club Luncheon
With Creamed Chicken for you to munch on.
It's not the work that makes you sicken,
It's the # % \$ " @ ! ! ! # * * * * # & # * * * Creamed Chicken.

P.S.

Hell isn't fire nor lack of women,
It's Creamed Chicken Oceans that we must swim in.



TIA ROSA

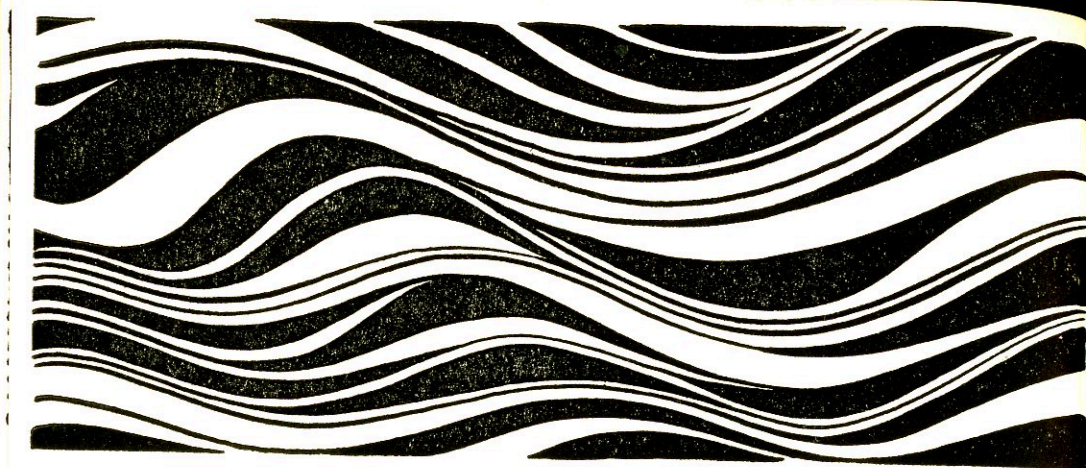
Tia Rose (Aunt Rose) is a philosopher of Olvera Street, Los Angeles, who incidentally sells jumping beans, cactus candy, beads, sombrero ashtrays, painted porcelain pigs and other souvenirs to tourists.

What are you thinking, Tia Rosa,
What are you thinking, sitting there?
You watch the noisy laughing people
With your dark inscrutable stare.
Memories hover over your shoulders
Like a mantilla of tattered lace.
What are the thoughts behind the sadness
Of your ageless Aztec face?

"Jomping beans," says Tia Rosa,
"Why they jomping? They don't know.
People just like jomping beans. . . .
Why they jomping? Where they go?
They don't know. . . .
Beans don't know . . .
You know?
NO!

MY KIND OF DAY

A gusty day . . . a lusty day,
What if it is a dusty day,
It's not a musty, fusty day,
It's not a damp and rusty day.
It's a nippy day, a zippy day.
It gives the skirts a hippy sway
As maidens pass in their trippy way,
And the heart does a flip in a skippy way.
It's a windy rip-and-whippy day,
It's sort of a laugh-on-the-lippy day.
The kind of day I like.



BEAUTY KNOWS

Beauty knows
That the yellow rose
Doesn't need all those
 Petticoats and frills
 To give the bee his thrills
 So that he fulfills
Her dainty ravishment.
The bee is quite content.
His busy mind is bent
 On honey more than passion.
 The rose must spend her perfumed cash on
 This display of petalled fashion
For Beauty's sole delight.
I think I might
Be right.

Beauty is wise. . . .
The peacock's jewelled eyes
Are more than a gay surprise
 For the coy admiring hen.
 Why all that grandeur when
 Nature, knowing fowls and men
Planted a need in flesh and feather
Greater than mere "which or whether"

To get him-and-her together.
It's my guess
That the hen would say "yes"
Without all that fancy dress.
 Make no mistake,
 With form or man or plume of drake,
 Orchid petal, scale of snake . . .
 Beauty is for Beauty's sake.

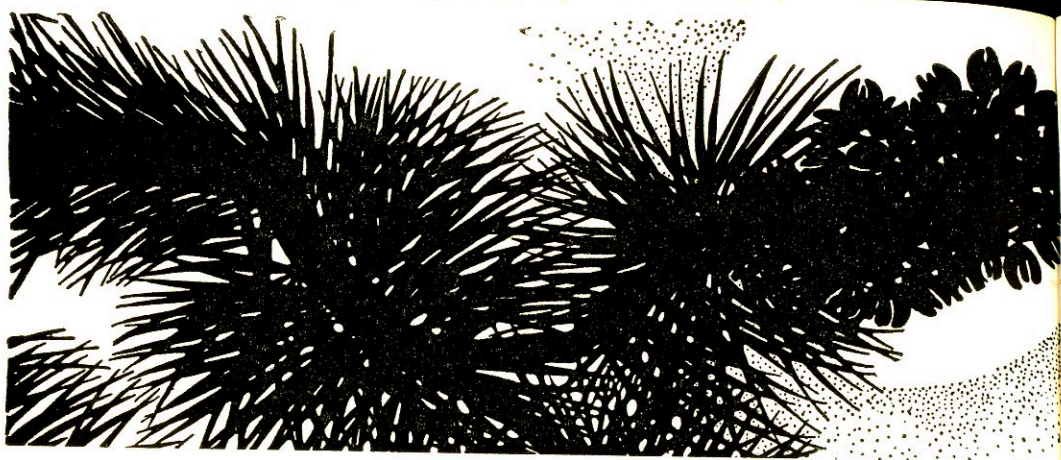
SEASCAPE

How kitten-soft are little waves
 That chase the crabs along the sand.
How tiger-fierce are savage waves
 That charge and claw the sullen land.

FOR "REVISERS"

For C.C., H.H.J., E.H.G., F.W., N.L., F.G., H.H., D.B., E.B.Y., B.M. and M.D.

Can we not hold remembered loveliness
 As a cloak against rain?
Is it not a talisman
 Exorcising pain?
Shall not its shining
 Gild our hearts over the shadows' stain?



JOSHUA TREES

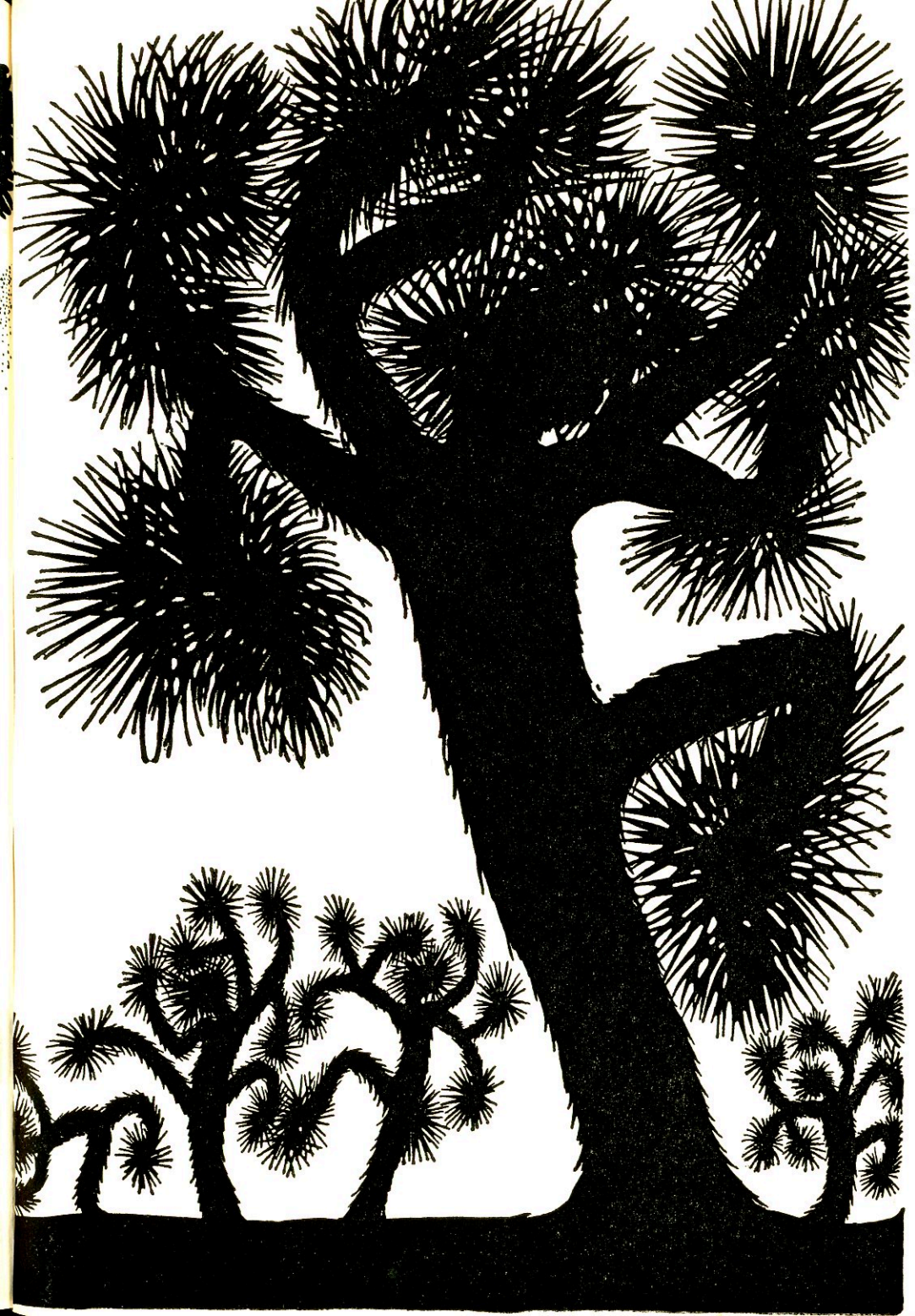
Sentries by day with bayonets on guard,
Prophets by night in attitudes of prayer;
But when the dusk spreads veils across the hard
Sharp outlines of the land they hear an air,
Piped on a Pan-ic flute, unseen and far,
An echo from an older, gayer land;
They catch the winking of an elfin star
And dance a quaint arthritic saraband.

DYES

Leach the dyes from a peacock's breast,
Melt sapphires,
Blue from driftwood fires,
And a macaw's crest,
Powdered lapis, a jay's bright feather,
Swirl them together
With phosphorus glow . . .
Tahoe.

MOON SONGS

She sang to me in silver in her crescent youth,
Sang me songs of silver, cold as truth.
As she waxed to fullness, she sang in bronze and brass,
Songs of transient passion that flame and pass.
Only in her waning, as her heart grew old
Could she voice her love-songs . . . sung in gold.



"CALIFORNIA, HERE WE COME!"

"California, here we come." Hear the cry across the nation?
With the housing situation it is cause for perturbation.
They are coming, coming, coming, coming, coming, coming, coming.
Hear the vast acceleration of their motors humming, drumming,
Every sort of transportation, motor, plane or train or bumming.

Iowa has sent its quota,
Likewise North and South Dakota,
Even Maine, its wee iota.

Blond Norwegians by the legions
From the Minnesota regions,
Okies, Arkies and Ozarkies,
Also ritzy New York Parkies,
Haughty adenoidal British,
Widows, grass and sod and skittish,
Lots of folks that hail from Florida
Where the weather is much torrida.

Here are G.I.'s by the dozens
With their parents, aunts and cousins,
All their kin-folks, fat and thin folks,
Holy Joes and Lost-in-Sin-folks.
Every shade of hair and skin-folks,
Sometimes even Siamese-twin folks,

Others lured here by the mention
Of a juicy old-age pension
Here for this or that convention,
Or in hope of life extension,
Youngsters seeking movie glamour
Adding chaos to the clamour

Writers peddling their fiction,
Teachers of the perfect diction,
Furtherers of social friction,
Refugees from house eviction,
Dancers twirling in the ballets,
Folks from palaces and alleys,
Tourists here in search of scenery,

Some who'll start a little beanery,
Bobby soxers, sweet sixteenery,
Financiers and slick promoters,
Demagogues who sway the voters,
Aging Sow-Their-Last-Wild-Oaters,
Grafters, crafters, loafers, drifters,
Frenzied spiritual up-lifters,
And the usual Fair-Frail-Sisters,
Javanese and hula twisters,
Health fanatics, sun-burned nudists,
Holy Rollers, swamis, Buddhists,
Patent medicine exudists,
Orphan Annie's, baby sitters,
Spit-and-argue, sit-and-knitters,
Crystal gazers, necromancers,
Wealthy former coats-and-pantsers.
Spinsters, fair and fat and fluttery,
Making pottery and puttery,
Cranks who should be in a nuttury.
Hen-pecked husbands going on a
Little jaunt to Tia Juana
Getting rid of old frustrations
With some harmless dissipations,
Folks from Canada and Cuba,
And performers on the tuba,
Neighbors from Below The Border,
Refugees from Law and Order,
Bathing beauties, sex appealers,
Strange Messiahs, heels and healers,
"California, here we come." Hear the cry across the nation.
They are coming by the thousands, every day without cessation,
Who could stop them? Who would stop them? Hail their coming with
elation!
It's the story of our country's polyglottish population.



SMOKE IN THE MOUNTAINS

Smoke in the mountains, flame in the valleys,
Fear in the forest,
Fire . . . fire.
Fiercer, higher,
The flames are leaping,
Serpent-tongues of fire creeping.
Run, little creatures, death is behind you,
Hide as you will, the flame will find you.
Run, little creatures, frenzied, frantic,
Flames with cruel demon antic
Will tease you, trick you,
Hunggrily lick you,
Seal your eyes with hot swift kisses,
Mock your moans with viper hisses!
Run to the water . . . run to the river,
Plunge with desperate gasp and shiver,
Swim if you can, swim madly, blindly,
Water-death is slow but kindly.

Fly, wild bird, fly feathered mother,
Smoke is quick to choke and smother
Fledglings in the nest. Their crying
Blends with fire's crackling frying.
Twigs and feathers burn like tinder
Turning soon to blackened cinder.





Run, men run . . . and no delaying,
Women, stumbling, falling, praying,
Children shrieking,
Hot tears streaking
Faces gray with smoke and ashes,
Sky inflamed with livid flashes.
Leave your homes, your dreams, your treasure.
Fire will eat with coyote pleasure.
Where can you run . . . the flames surrounding,
Leaping, lashing, racing, bounding,
Red stampede of flame-herd sounding.
Run, men, run, with faces graying,
Hear the death-hounds snarling, baying,
Run, men, run till spent knees buckle,
Flames will munch on bone and knuckle,
 Fat and marrow make fine fuel
 For cremation, quick and cruel.

Circle, buzzards, circle slowly,
Greedy-eyed, unclean, unholy,
Circle, buzzards, black as sorrow,
There'll be meat for you tomorrow.

ETERNAL QUESTIONS

For Frank Palomares, 111

When I was young my questing eyes
Were filled with What's and Where's and Why's.
What lies beyond the farthest star?
What makes us as we are?
And who designs the flakes of snow?
Is it the root or stem that knows
The blue-print that instructs the rose?
Where does the violet get its blue?
Why am I I instead of you?
Now that the years have made me wise
I still find questions in my eyes . . .
A special one . . . I wish I knew
Why I am I instead of you?

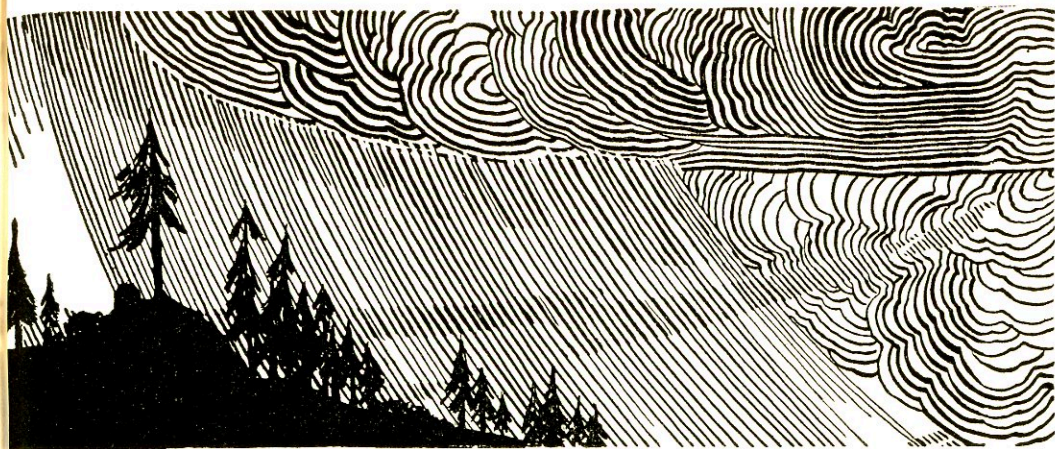
CANDID CAMERA, SANTA BARBARA

Santa Barbara, a handsome dowager,
Cultured, wealthy, expertly girdled,
Wearing at least one Spanish shawl
To Fiesta,
Wistfully draping over her groomed white hair
The mended mantilla of a romantic age
Which probably never quite was.

ENOUGH

Enough is not enough.
Too much is even less.
Enough is satiety.
Too much is revulsion.
Not-quite-enough is about right . . .
It is the bait for more.





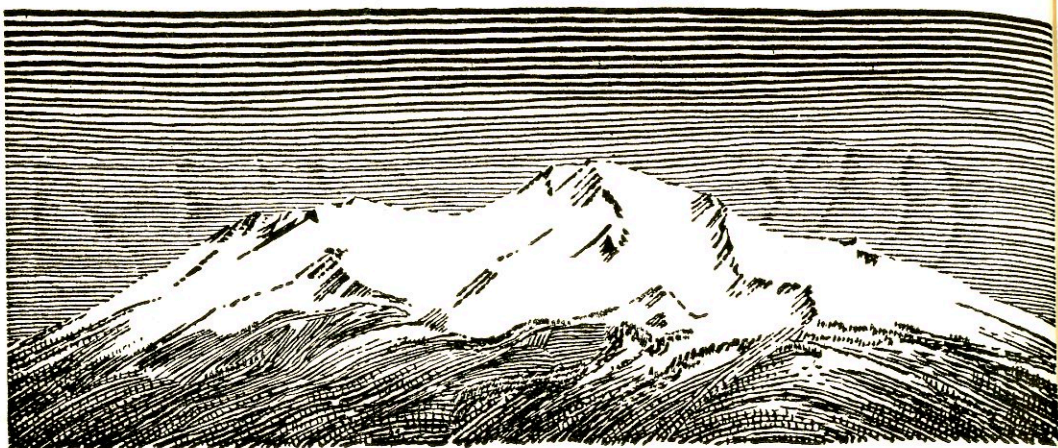
TREES IN OUR HEARTS

How deeply trees are rooted in our hearts,
How strongly beamed and timbered in our past,
The mothering cradle when the young life starts,
The black enclosing cradle at the last,
The jumping jack, the top, the wooden horse,
Forest gifts to grace the Christmas tree,
The tools of work, the weapons of brute force,
The scaffold and the cross of Calvary,

The birthing bed, the roof-tree and the fuel,
The fruits for eating and the incense-breath,
The healing roots and oils and the dark cruel
Hemlock and its sister brews of death,
The wooden ships of voyaging, the plane,
The family tree of man's ancestral charts,
The tree of knowledge yielding joy and pain. . . .
How deeply trees are rooted in our hearts.

GOOD NIGHT

Singly or in lover-pairs or family groups
The pine-trees stand atip-toe on the hilltop
To bid their old dear friend the sun
"Good Night."



CALIFORNIA MONTAGE

What do I hear when I say the name "California"?

I hear the sullen gnawing of a glacier munching with monstrous blunt
teeth at the base of a cliff in the High Sierra

*And the tiny persistent chewing of a termite in a beam of an old adobe
by the Camino Real.*

I hear the roar of an avalanche down the grim face of San Jacinto

And the avalanche roar of Diesel trucks over the Ridge Route.

I hear the crying of a lonely coyote on the hills above Mojave

*And the frightened crying of an extra-girl on the casting-couch of a
Hollywood flesh-peddler.*

I hear the rumble of furious flash-floods through the canyons of the
Panamints

*And the furious rumble of flash-floods of traffic through the canyons
of the cities at the peak hour.*

I hear the Symphony Under The Stars at Hollywood Bowl

*And the silent symphony of the stars in the Heavens above Mount
Wilson.*

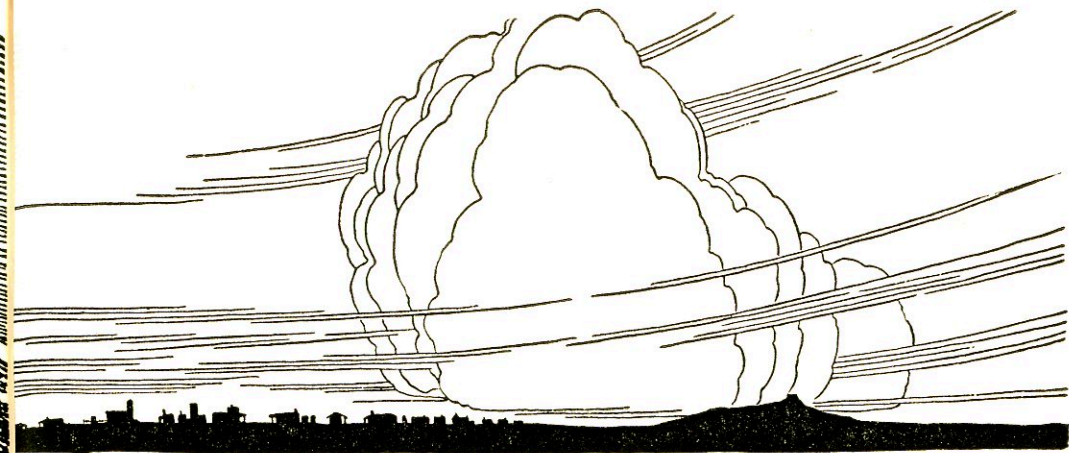
I hear the jazz-patter of a tap-dancer's feet in a roadside clip-joint

*And the soft tick-tick of a Mexican jumping-bean in a souvenir tray
in Olvera Street.*

I hear the earth-shaking crash of a giant Sequoia falling

*And the whisper of a seed stirring to growth under the forest loam of
Yosemite.*

I hear the hungry feasting of a forest fire in the San Bernardino moun-
tains



*And the digestive rumble of masticating thousands in the cafeterias
of Los Angeles.*

I hear the wolf-howl of storm waves on Point Lobos

And the beast cry of a crowd at a prize-fight.

I hear the chilling scream of a mountain lion among the pines

And the ominous stridency of a rabble-rouser in Pershing Square.

*I hear the sad moaning of the night wind among the cypress groves of
Monterey*

*And the weeping of an anguished mother in an itinerant labor camp
in the river bottoms at night.*

I hear the tidal pulse of the Pacific at Laguna

And the fading pulse of a heart at Olive View.

I hear the maniac laughter of a loon in a lost mountain lake

And the loon laughter of a delirious veteran in a psychopathic ward.

I hear the croaking of frogs in the tule marshes of San Joaquin

*And the voices of demagogues croaking platitudes in the mud-ponds of
the political scene.*

*I hear the jet-propulsioned planes slitting the stratosphere above
Mount Whitney*

And the splendid terrible wings of Destiny circling above California.

I hear the whine of saws among the redwoods of Eureka

And the nasal caterwaulings of a torch-singer in a hot spot on the Strip.

*I hear the chiffon susurrus of a movie-star's lingerie as she emotes in
a scene from Bruises of Passion*

*And the silken sigh as a wild poppy flips its green night-cap and spreads
its golden garments to the spotlight of the sun.*



I see the driftwood and wreckage piled on Pacific shores by the whim
of tides and the violence of storms,
*And the human wreckage and driftwood beached in the skidrows and
Lower Main Streets by the vaster tides of human destiny.*
I see the buzzards whirling slowly, awaiting the death of a wounded
buck in the mountains
*And the human vultures of the cities waiting to feed on disaster and
tragedy.*
I see Mount Shasta unveiling the white chastity of her majestic breasts
to the ardent eyes of the sun
*And the slim ripening curves of Miss Avocado for 1950 stripped to the
ultimate censorable inch for the cold recording eye of the news-
reel camera.*
I see the bent laboring backs of Mexicans in the green acres of the Salad
Bowl of Salinas
*And the manicured fingers of Mrs. Rheba Rombooid Rearbumper dip-
ping into the salad bowl at a luncheon of the Three Way Stretch
Girdle Gabble and Gobble Club.*
I see the slow crawl of a caterpillar inching its way across the sun-
warmed granite of Beetle Rock.
*And the caterpillar crawl of covered wagons of the pioneers across the
blazing deserts to the Golden West*
I hear the pizzicato of a pretty Junior Leaguer's high heels on the Pea-
cock Alleys of fashion,
*And the dry staccato of a burro's feet on the stony trails of the gold
country.*



I hear the shambling shuffle of a panhandler's feet on the sidewalks of
the cities

*And the ghostly shuf-shuf of a padre's dusty sandals on the long miles
of the King's Road.*

I see a ranch-woman brushing the bright mirage of rouge on her weath-
ered cheeks in preparation for the shopping trip to the metropolis
*And I see the desert rouging its Indian brown face with the transient
rosiness of small flowers after rain.*

I see the delicate tracery of a lace mantilla on the stately head of a
dowager at fiesta in Santa Barbara
*And the green mantilla of the pepper trees veiling the faded beauty of
an old mission.*

I see the military erectness of soldiers on guard at Presidio
*And the formal lines of palm trees guarding a small bungalow on a road
in San Fernando.*

I see the changeless patterns of the constellations against the obsidian
of the night sky
*And the purposed flight of the great Constellation planes changing the
pattern of the embroidery of stars.*

I see Gloria Glamour snuggling into the chinchilla gift of a fatuous
Sugar Daddy
*And the High Sierra peaks draping their great shoulders with the
ermine of winter.*

I see the busy skillful fingers of ceramic workers in the pottery shops
of Laguna



*And the broken shards of smoke-blackened pots in the kitchen-middens
of ancient vanished peoples of the West.*

I see the lace on the perfumed shoulders of a debutante at a coming-out
party in Pasadena

*And the rigid lace that commerce weaves with oil derricks on the curves
of Signal Hill.*

I hear the tragic chanting of the death-wail of Indians mourning the
passing of a chief and the passing of their people from among the
peoples of the earth

*And the planned beautiful sedative of organ-music in a chapel at Forest
Lawn.*

I hear the weary plodding of a hitch-hiker on the highways of Cali-
fornia, seeking hoped-for opportunity in the Golden State

*And I hear the silent fateful feet of Tomorrow carrying an unknown
packsack of destiny to the shores of the Pacific.*

I see a spider weaving its web between the branches of a eucalyptus
tree on the slopes of Tamalpais

*And the mighty web of the Golden Gate Bridge spanning the waters
between towering headlands.*

I hear the pompous voice of a radio commentator settling the fates of
nations with godlike authority

*And the shrill gaffer voices of old men arguing politics, religion and
the Old Age Benefits of the Hereafter in the Spit-and-Argue Clubs
of Long Beach.*

I hear the murmurous voice of the waves on the rocky cliffs of Big
Sur



And the confused murmured rituals of a thousand cults lifting supplications to a hundred variants of God.

I hear the slice of a plow through the dark fertile earth-flesh of the truck gardens of the Imperial Valley

And the slicing sadistic knife in the tortured flesh of a victim of sex-madness on a lonely side-road beyond the city.

I hear the bright bubble of a promoter's dream swell, burst and collapse amidst the wailing of the sucker-lists,

And I hear a black bubble rise, swell and burst with an oleaginous blurp in the tar-pits of La Brea.

I hear the wood-pecker's busy drill on a tree at Camp Kaweah

And the pneumatic drill's busy woodpeckering in a construction job in the busy city.

I see a falling star trace its flaming course in diminishing brilliance across the night sky

And watch the swift dimming brightness of a movie-star's passing as the years quench the transient brilliance of pretty, empty eyes.

I hear the chatter of a squirrel in a tree at Big Pine

And the raucous ballyhoo of a barker outside a burlesque show.

I see the frost turning the leafage of aspen to newly minted gold on the slopes of a mountain above Twin Lakes

And Antoine or Pierre turning the tresses of an aging divorcee to specious gold in a beauty parlor of Beverly Hills.

I see the vast fascinating montage of California days blurring and blending before my eyes

And I love California . . .

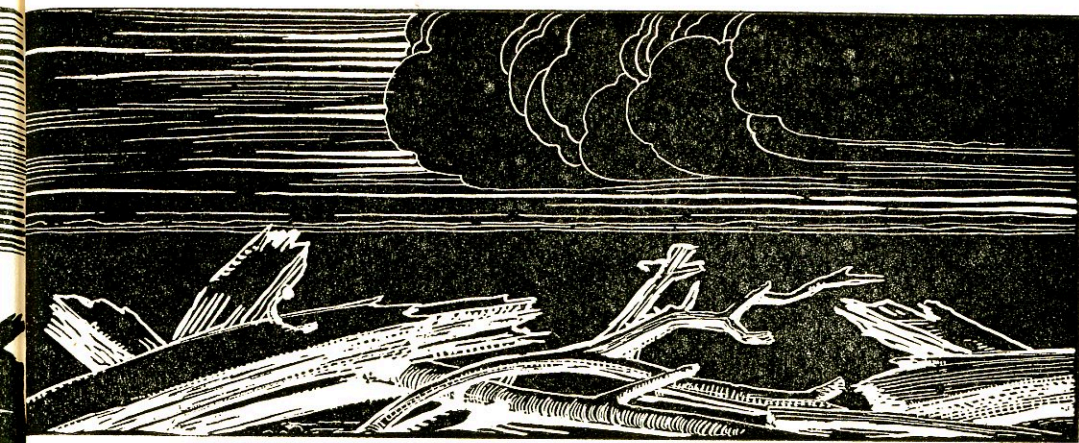
What's more . . . I like it.



OUT THERE

Out there . . . out there . . .
Beyond the dim horizon
A golden road is leading, is pleading to the drifter,
The road the plover flies on,
The road the gray gull cries on,
The road the outcast dies on,
Horizon and horizon, the ever-new horizon,
It draws the dreamer's eyes on
To goals he'll never find
Although his heart flies swifter
Than hawk or hunted hind.

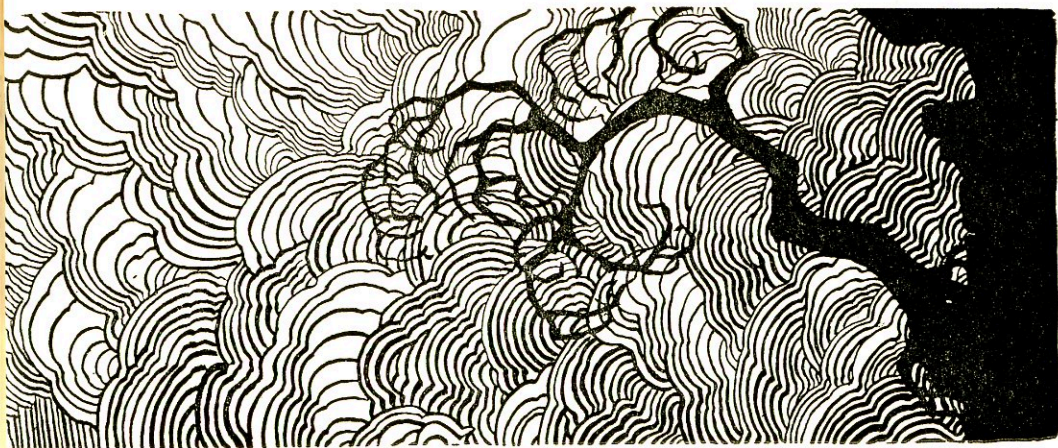
Out there . . . out there
Where sea and sky are merging
A golden road is gleaming, is dreaming for the roamer,
Where cobalt waves are surging,
Where typhoon winds are dirging,
Where brazen suns are scourging
The lands beyond the moon . . . the lands of Rigadoon.
A constant, distant urging,
A subtle, silent croon,
A ghostly summons verging
On madness of the loon
Is calling to the roamer above the roaring comber,



The leopard goddess calling,
With savage caterwauling,
A phantom voice, enthralling,
Among the jungle vines that weave in serpent-crawling
Where templed walls are falling
And broken idols sprawling
Across deserted shrines
Where wraiths of ancient incense
Float up in spiraled lines.

The luring voice beseeches
Above the macaw's screeches,
Its mystic magic speech is
The echoes of a story to enchant the hearts of lovers,
A story gray and hoary
Of golden fleece and glory,
Of deeds of valor, gory.
The ageless lurement hovers,
And each new age discovers
The face of Circe haunting,
The deathless challenge taunting,
The ragged banners flaunting
Out there . . . out there . . .
Out there.





MAVERICK LAND

(Maverick, an unbranded animal, formerly claimed by the first one branding it.)

What do I see when I say the name "California"?

First I send my heart in vast spiralled wanderings
On tireless condor-wings
Cruising the sky,
Zenith high,
Speeding through centuries, circling space
To the time-place
When California was young, young,
Unsung,
Unnamed,
Maverick-land, savagely free, unbranded, untamed.

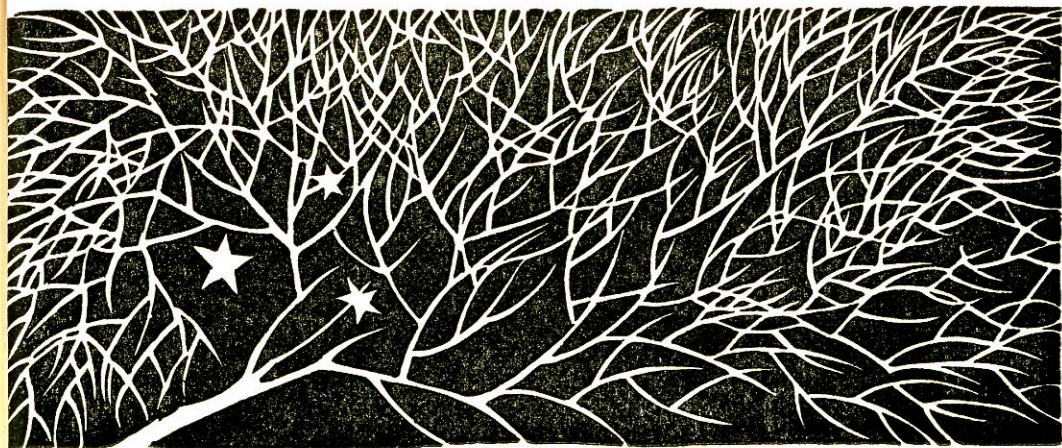
I see the great troglodyte body, muscled and brawny,
Splendid and tawny,
Sprawled in primitive nudeness
Boasting its crudeness,

Male in its strength, male with a cosmic virility,
Female in beauty, female in latent fertility,
Twin-celled, twin-souled, star-high to reach,
Potential of god-hood, manhood, beasthood, something of each,
Amorphous of mind, unawakened, awaiting
Destiny's splendid and terrible mating.

As plastic as clay, as dimly aware as the clod



That felt the first formative fingers of God;
Titan, lustily young in full primal fettle,
Mountains for vertebrae, granite-boned, marrowed with metal,
Arteries fed with the ice-blood of glacial snow,
Black-blood-of-oil, darkly venous, in deep sluggish flow,
Piebald with earth-flesh, adobe, red soil, and muddy
Alluvial stains, black-and-tan or russetly ruddy,
Forests of body hair, breast-surface downy with grasses,
Chaparral, clustered and matted, virilely pubic,
Rivers of sweat draining wrinkles and sinewy masses
Of hill muscles, sunburned and rubic,
Pustules of craters, lavas that issue
In red suppurations clotted to show the scar-tissue
Of agonized birthings, salt of old seas whitely crusting,
Ridges of stratified rock starkly thrusting
Like fossil bones, fractured and jagged,
White fangs of peaks, snarling at stars, slashing the ragged
Fleeces of cloud-sheep fleeing the wolf-wind's wild howling,
Eyes of blue lakes, dark-lashed with pines, bleakly scowling
In frozen defiance of sun-glare, or wistfully staring
At white moons, recurrent and mooded, or watching the flaring
Of meteors searing the sky or comets' slow motion,
Singing great songs with the baritone voice of the ocean,
Virgin with ardent expectancy, flesh deeply quaking,
Eager, afraid . . . and hotly expectant of waking
With psychic awareness of joy and pain of the taking.



MAVERICK BRANDED

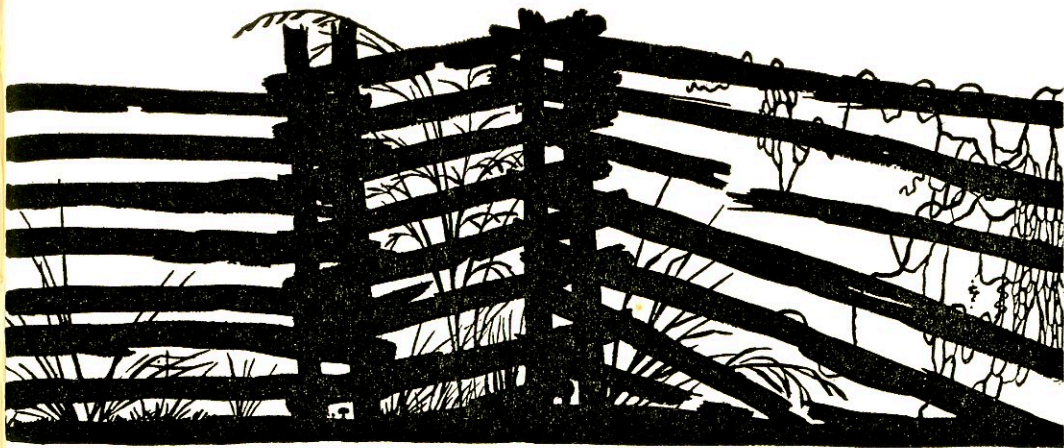
With scouting eyes of an eagle I see the first harness.
Seen in its farness
Frail as the web of a spider, gossamer-fragile,
Woven by feet of the first-man, animal-agile,
Driven by urges lost in the dawn-light of history,
Walking small in the presence of mountains of mystery,
Nameless vagrants,
Timorous-eyed, with nostrils alert for each fragrance
Strange or familiar to guide them;
Fear stalks beside them.
Less than ants to the scornful eyes of the giant,
Yet, with the power of weakness, furtively pliant,
Tracing the first fateful thread of a rope slowly twisted
To shackle and hog-tie the maverick-land in the misted
Centuries waiting the patience of time to be born,
Till that fate-burdened morn
When guardian gulls lifted cries of clamorous shrieking
Warning of monstrous sea-hawks, rapacious and seeking,
White on the skyline moving with slow steady winging,
Bringing
Men who would fashion the links of a chain,
Salt-sweated, prayer-welded, dark with the stain
Of blood, mud and agony, telling a story
Of misery and Missions, romance and terror and glory . . .



Camino Real, the Road of the King,
A so-small thing
To measure the length
And imprison the strength
Of a defiant
Giant.

MAVERICK, HARNESSSED AND DRIVEN

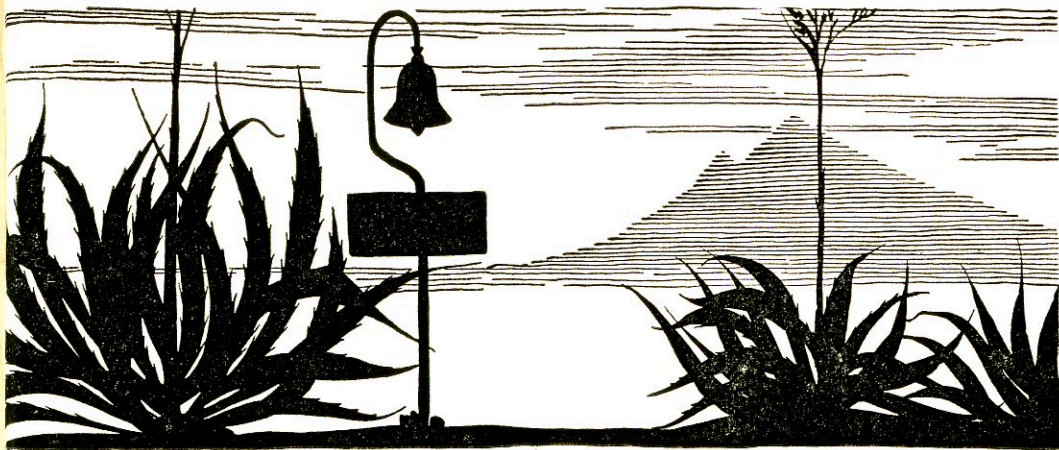
Through the warm golden eye of the sun
And the silver eye of the moon
I see the web spun,
And soon, as Life counts time, soon
The web is a mighty mesh
With ever-fresh
Thongs, cords and ropes
Woven from hopes
Of armies of men who advance,
Emigrants,
Trappers, soldiers, schemers,
Scum, the petty, the great-visioned dreamers,
Stronger and stronger,
Tighter and longer,
Chain of hoof-prints of Pony Express
Spanning the wilderness,
Double-cord stretched by wheels of Covered Wagon trails,



Double-cord of gleaming metal rails,
Vibrancy of vocal cords spun through telephone wires,
Rubber bands of auto tires,
Sooty cables of smoke from trains,
Transient, ever-renewed vapor chains
From transcontinental planes.

Now the web of Tomorrow
And Tomorrow's tomorrow
Is weaving, weaving,
The shimmering woof of believing
Threads the bright warp of strong hope.
What shall it be . . . a garment or shackling rope
Twisted from shreds of the fabric?
There is no abra-ca-dabric
To give us the wisdom for knowing . . .
Where are we going . . .
Where are you going?





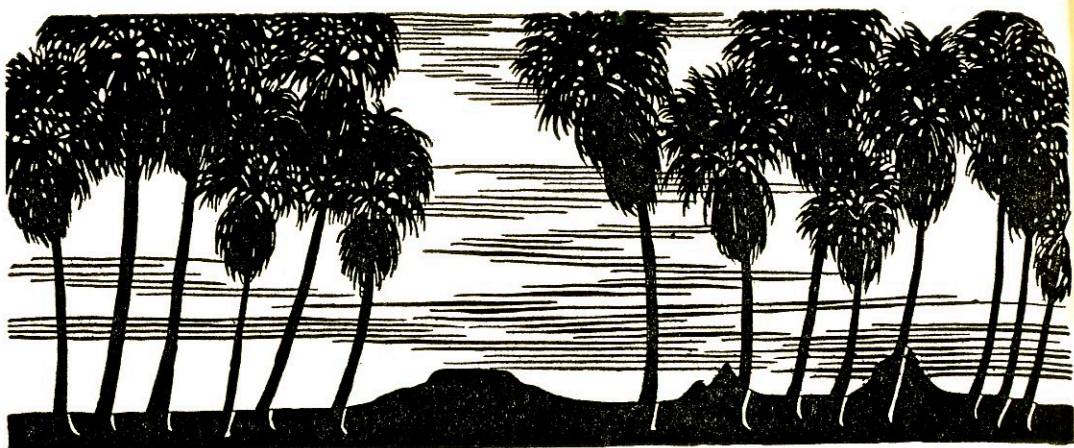
CALIFORNIA SPEAKS

*No state can be great except through the heart of its people . . .
Do we measure a church by the height of its towering steeple?*

I would be great through you, my sons and my daughters,
Native-born sons and you who journey vast waters
Drawn by your visions, your seeking and heart-weary hoping
To people my valleys and shores, to furrow the sloping
Hills into harvest, to harness the strength of my rivers.
I would breed builders and planners and makers and givers.
I would have sons who dream greatly, hope greatly, live greatly,
Who would build me a Mansion of Life that is splendid and stately.

I give you the flesh of my soil and my blood for distilling,
Black blood of oil from my deeps, artesianly spilling,
Gold blood of citrus, red blood of grapes richly flowing,
Water, the white blood, the life-blood transfusion for growing.
I give you my bones, my metals, my limestones and granite
For building our house . . . but you must fashion and plan it.

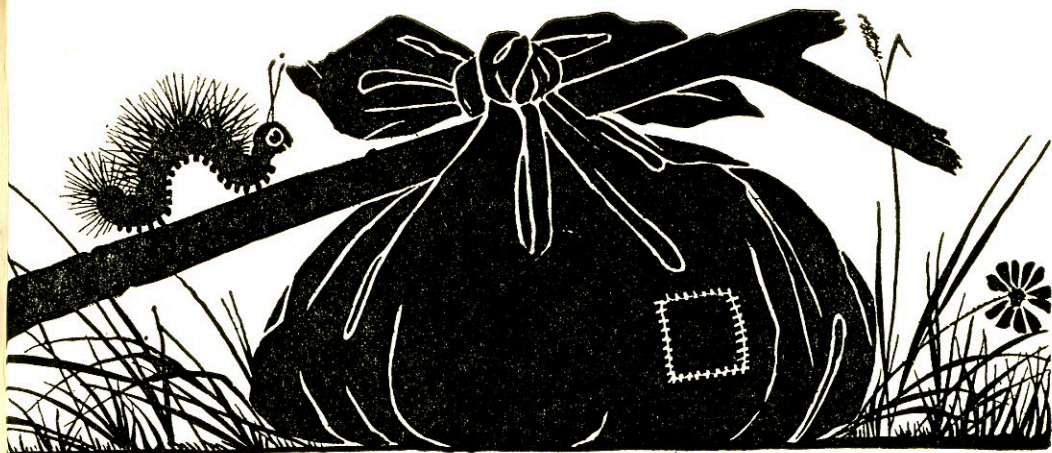
You who are poets, find words for my story, then rhyme them.
Take your hearts to my mountains and bid your hearts climb them.
Write of their grandeur, their challenge, their silence and mystery.
Take amber of words and preserve my turbulent history.
Read the great stars of my destiny shining above me.
Teach my children to know me, to help me, to love me.



Go to my deserts, you who are artists. Portray me.
Paint silence. Find colors and rhythms that you may convey me.
Paint distance, so vast that the soul may learn its aloneness.
Paint wonder. Paint time. Paint life and its godlike unknowness.

You who are builders, build as my redwoods have builded.
Seekers, find gold that my name may be wondrously gilded
With gold that is finer than gold that my deep veins have yielded.
You who are warriors, my honor is yours to be shielded.
You who are warriors of faith, inspire, exalt me . . .
No alien foe, only you may degrade me or halt me.

Here is haven for homeless. The haven is yours for the taking.
It is haven or Hell . . . Hell or haven . . . yours is the making.
You are my children. Be brothers . . . a family uniting.
Destiny offers her torch . . . we are fuel for that lighting.
You are my greatness, my triumph, my splendor, my sorrow.
Give me the boon that I ask . . . a splendid Tomorrow.



YOU'RE WELCOME

I have opened my vagabond's pack
To show you treasure and trash and truck,
Fossil bone from the primal muck,
Quill from a porcupine's spiney back,
Jumping bean from Olvera Street,
Petal of dogwood, cinnibar,
Autograph of a movie star,
Track of a panther's stealthy feet,
Juniper berry and burro's shoe,
Moonstone found on a storm-swept shore,
Comb that a Spanish dancer wore,
Jaybird feather of flashing blue,
Skull from a prehistoric cave,
Bullet found in a ghost-town bar,
Gleam of a planet from Palomar,
Flower plucked from a nameless grave.

Loot that a small boy's pockets hold,
(What is a man but a small boy grown
with values a small boy makes his own,
measuring driftwood above bright gold)?
Skin of a horned toad, odd shaped rock,
Wing of a gull and an eagle's claw,
Nugget of gold from a chicken's crow,
Wooden bird from a cuckoo clock.

Coin from a smuggler's secret cove,
Leaf of aspen and lupine bud,
Primitive shard of sun-baked mud,
Dreamer's treasure and drifter's trove.
Amethyst bottle of sun-stained glass,
Deer-hoof rattle and cone of pine,
Sample of ore from an ancient mine,
Bead of rosary found in the grass.

Here in this weather-worn shabby pack
Are gay mementoes and souvenirs
Of turbulent, restless driven years,
Loved . . . but I would not bring them back
Except as pictures and "pass-alongs";
All regrets have been sieved away.
I'm glad that I lived each varied day,
Those are the words of my vagabond songs.
I have opened my roadworn heart
To show you visions and scars and hopes,
Fears as stark as a hangman's ropes,
Dreams that followed a dim blurred chart
To cities of Cibola lost in mist,
To lonely places and romance streets,
To harbors of wandering phantom fleets,
To white high peaks that the moon has kissed.

Take what you want . . . leave what you will,
Something battered and something new,
It's only worth what it's worth to you . . .
And a vagabond's pack is quick to fill.



ALOHA,

ADIOS,

UNTIL
AGAIN



